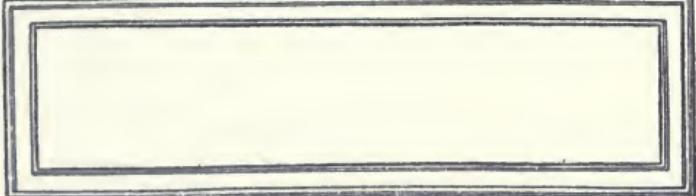
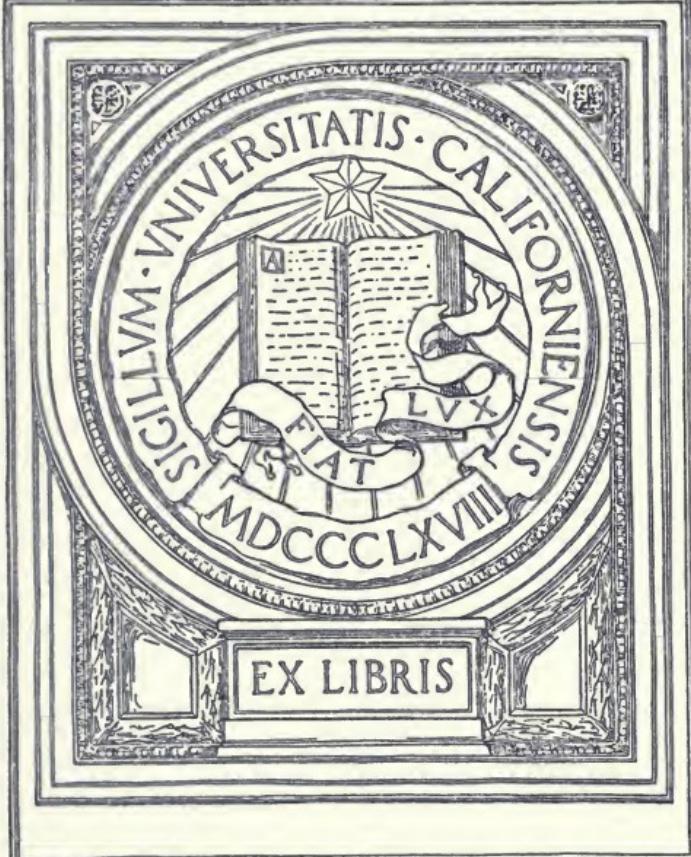


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"Joe," he cries, "where are ye?"—p. 83.

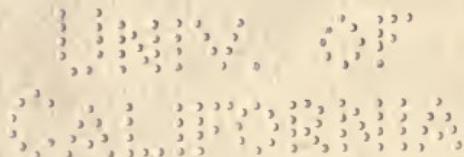
SEA SPRAY

3

By

FRANK T. BULLEN, F.R.G.S.

*Author of "The Men of the Merchant Service," "Creatures
of the Sea," "Sea Puritans," etc*



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THE following Collection of Short Stories
and Essays have been published at various
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Gentleman* and the *Daily Mail*, to whose pro-
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FRANK T. BULLEN.

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I

A Night at Sea

PERFECT peace. Over all the wide circle of the sea spread around me there lies a hush of infinite solace, a sense of eternal truce between warring creatures and battling elements ; the very zephyr, scarcely rippling the plane of the ocean, is like the wafting of a kiss of tenderest maternal love.

I sit upon the forecastle-head with a strange consciousness of aloofness from my kind, of being poised in space far removed from the possibility of a disturbing word or even thought. I do not look behind me, where the splendid panoply of sails rises tier upon tier into the ether, every piece of canvas gently held in perfect shape, a series of most beautiful curves, by the steady suasion of the delicate breeze, for I am keenly conscious of its presence. The only sound apparent is the cooing ripple of the smoothly parted waters as the great fabric of steel glides through them ; indeed, it is hardly more than the suggestion of

sound, serving to bring more fully to the resting senses the lulling silence.

Above me the blue infinity, adorned with countless globules of crystal light, spreads its limitless dome, in contemplation of which the soul realizes its true region, and, unshackled by bodily hamperings, soars beyond the shining stars in eager quest of the unknowable. Sea and sky blend so perfectly that the illusion of being suspended in space becomes impossible to avoid ; but gradually it combines with another and more subtle idea. That wide glade of molten silver laid from the horizon to me by the glorious moon must be traversable, leading by a definite and unmistakable road to the real place of my desire. So strongly does this mystical sense of tangibility become impressed upon my mind, that the indefinable verge of the bright way appears full of palaces and spires and domes, compacted of light and the shadow of light. For the eyes have lost power, temporarily, to see what is there before them, and only behold what is not.

A meteor blazes into incandescence and sails slowly through the sky, parallel to the horizon, and forty degrees above it by man's empirical measurement, leaving behind it a broad riband of glowing light, as if a rift had been made in the heavens, revealing a trace of the unutterable splendour beyond. That silvern line is drawn

around a third of the apparent circumference in the wake of the triumphal star, until the painful contracting of my scalp and the searing sensation of intense cold over the great ganglions of my body draw me down with irresistible grasp to the limitations of physical disability. The flesh for the time resumes its despotism ; matter hampers mind, and hunger, chill, weariness, knock clamorously at the door of sense, which admits them to the mournful accompaniment of a heavy sigh.

But the buoyant spirit again eludes gross holding, and soars among the thickly-sown starlets of the Milky Way, which, like the floating vesture of some mighty angel, extends from east to west across the placid blue.

What is it that draws my gaze so persistently to the moon ? She hangs in the infinite sky, a perfect circle of glowing silver, her well-defined markings strangely real to the unassisted eye as mountain and valley and sea.

Yet there is something amiss with her light : surely it is not fading ! There is not in all the vast concave the tiniest wisp of cloud or suspicion of haze to dim her usual radiant effulgence. Still, I cannot avoid the knowledge that the brilliancy is leaving the splendid satellite, she is becoming just a flat white disc, from which the light is departing. Is it, I ask myself, with a

momentary spasm of dread, that I am going blind ? Does sight thus leave the eyes ? How foolish of me ; the stars are increasing their lustre, the less remote planets blazing like miniature suns. And then I note, with new dismay, an encroaching darkness on the moon's rim, a creeping upon her of a circular shadow, and I say, aloud, for my own comfort, "Why, it's an eclipse." And I try to remember that this is a purely natural phenomenon, its time of occurrence predicted many years beforehand to the fraction of a second by astronomical science.

But it is of no avail. That innate sense of the supernatural, which is one of the deepest instincts of human nature, forbids me so to look upon this solemn celestial display being given with infinitesimal me for sole spectator (as I feel). The shadow advances fatefully ; the gloom upon the waters deepens ; the sweet peaceful silence becomes the terrible strained hush before some awful calamity ; the breathless waiting for a cataclysm. Strange spectral glares begin to show in the sea, as if the good spirits were being imprisoned for a season and the demons of the depth were gathering for high carnival.

Still the darkening of the moon goes on, the sky deepening in colour until, as the last faint crescent of white disappears the whole vault above is of so deep a violet that it may almost be called

black. It is a curious darkness, too, an unnatural gloom which has none of the characteristics of the overcast sky, or of the appearance of the heavens upon an ordinary moonless night.

There is a sense of tremendous loss, a feeling of bereavement, not to be expressed in mere words, and I unconsciously mourn the loss of the Lady of Night as if she were an intimately dear friend. While I am still perfectly conscious that her absence from view is but temporary, this is my feeling. And not unnaturally. How hard it is to realize upon a miserably gloomy and weeping day that just on the other side of the pall of cloud there is a boundless ocean of sunshine !

The stars have now grown still more brilliant, glowing like points of molten steel against the intensely dark background of the heavens. And in the west there rises the mysterious leaning cone of the Zodiacal Light, never so plainly visible as on a night like this. Like a far-off lambent reflection of some unutterably vast pyramid of fire glowing a universe away, it brightens and fades and brightens again, its borders melting so imperceptibly into the darkness as to make it impossible to decide where one ceases and the other begins.

And now, as if to heighten the darkness above, the sea is all ablaze with greenish light. Living flames, describing a thousand thousand mazy evo-

lutions amid an ocean that seems to be supplied with diffused light from beneath, whose every tiny wavelet breaks in a miniature surf of diamond spray. And a bewildered sea-bird, its fine sensibilities touched to their depths by the sudden and palpable dark, gives utterance to a long wail as of some acutely wretched spirit condemned to suffer inarticulately for ever.

Suddenly the tide of gloom has reached its ordained height. It begins to ebb in the same hastesless fashion as it flowed, and presently, bringing with it relief beyond my hopes, peeps out again the sweet shy curve of light. As if irresistibly forced to return to its darksome lair, the shadow recedes, reluctantly, lingeringly ; but the unshrouded face of the moon now beams brighter apparently than ever before. The lambent flame in the sea fades and almost disappears ; the stars resume their sober twinkling, and the Zodiacial Light disappears. The eclipse is over.

“ Pretty sight,” says my relief, with startling abruptness in my ear. I murmur something unintelligibly, and turn away with something like a feeling of despair. That such a vision of wonder should be spoken of as “ pretty ” !

II

A Fine Day at Sea

MOST trite and commonplace doubtless is the remark that miracles repeated become ordinary events, but, like so many other axioms, it is too often taken for granted for the most of us to realize its amazing wonder. And therefore it is so good for modern man to take a trip to sea occasionally in some grand comfortable vessel like the one in which I am now writing, and, devoid of all mundane cares for the time being, set himself resolutely to realize the nature and extent of the miracles by which he is surrounded. The result must be in any case the enlargement of his mind, a deepening of its receptivity of the thoughts that matter, the ideas that count ; and beyond, above all that, a quickening of his sense of participation in the glories and mysteries of inanimate creation. All of which will inevitably make for his highest enjoyment.

Let us consider, if you will, the miracle of a fine day at sea, as being, perhaps, the most ordinary of the happenings in certain parts of the ocean.

After a dreamless sleep, in which the deep-throated hum of the gigantic slaves below comes mellowed to a most melodious murmur, lulling the happily tired body to sweetest rest, you are awakened by some of your willing servants preparing the floating palace for your pleasure ere you rise. Do not let the drowsy god cajole you into further slumber—unnecessary, debilitating—but rise, even if the hour be most unusual, say as early as four a.m. Just in your sleeping rig come on deck, and watch the fading splendours of the night preparing to depart in hastesless procession. The silken sea reflects the glittering stars, and is divided by a wide silvern band shed by that molten white disc, my Lady Moon. Low down on the western horizon the setting stars glow redly by reason of refraction. As the eye turns slowly upwards, the higher luminaries glitter with a purer, more piercing sheen. So let the vision range over the purple concave until it reaches the eastern verge of sky and sea, where, although there is as yet no perceptible beginning of light, the stars are wan-ing, their gleam is dulled to a lustreless white. Look long enough, and the gentle luminaries fade completely away, making place for their mighty master, the Sun.

There is usually in these sub-tropical regions of the sea wherein I now roam so pleasantly, a brief interregnum between the departure of night

and the coming of day. It is apparently an indeterminate time, as if night had not yet decided to go and day were unwilling to come. Also, there is often at this time a heavy shower or two, shed by some gloomy nimbus clouds, which rise ghost-like, pass dispensing their refreshing burdens, and are gone. As the assiduous shipmen seize the opportunity afforded them by the interval of the middle watch, with its absence of guests, to prepare the floating home for another day's enjoyment, so do these homely clouds, with their beneficent illustrations, make sweeter and fresher still the loveliness of the coming day. They disappear, and along the eastern rim of the sea-circle shimmers a suggestion of light, followed imperceptibly, yet immediately, by silken streamers of tenderest tints, glowing, and paling, and changing against the lightening violet of the night. Their colours deepen, brighten, while the cloudlets around the horizon flush rosily like a bevy of virgins at the approach of the bridegroom. A golden glory floods the eastern sky, dominating, overpowering, the throbbing precursors in its splendour. The waiting sea reflects it, there is a hush of almost awful expectation as the last shade belonging to the night passes from the presence of light, and almost at a bound, with the majestic upward sweep of an archangel, the great Sun appears.

Look now at the sea, note how in multitudinous welcome it greets the day, how from each of its collected myriads of drops there beams a gleeful smile, as if with all created things the waters of the eternal ocean were rejoicing with joy ineffable, unutterable, obeying the sublime invocation of the Psalmist, “ Oh, all ye seas and floods, bless ye the Lord ; praise him, and magnify him for ever.”

This is, however, but the opening miracle, the prime factor of an expanding series, the result being infinity. For who can assess the value, or express it in terms comprehensible by finite minds, of one fine day ? Not that I dare depreciate the value of the rain, hail, frost, and snow, stormy wind fulfilling His word. But each of these in their own order. For the present we are far from the possibility of any of these happenings but the first, and that only in pleasantest passing fashion. We are just on the verge of the Tropic of Cancer in mid-Atlantic—a place of perennial sunshine by day and beauty of the tenderest by night. A place where the fiercely contending forces of sea and sky meet, as it were, on neutral ground, and peacefully commune with each other, sinking their differences, resting from the fury of their labours in purifying the earth, and murmuring kindliest welcome to the intruder upon their peaceful domain.

The day strengthens, brightens ; the golden sun soars ever higher towards the zenith, but his ardent beams are tempered by the cool and gentle breeze. There is no sense of heat or cold, the air, whether in sunshine or shadow, having a wooing softness about it that, while it lulls, does not debilitate. As the huge ship speeds steadily onward to her goal those wonderful little ocean nomads, the flying fish, rise and flee outwards from her path, singly, in small companies, and occasionally in such vast numbers that they appear like broad sheets of silver rising and falling over the intense blue of the sea. I often wonder what they think, or feel, or whatever it is that affects them in that way, when the vast mass of the ship comes gliding over them, with the enormous propeller whirling through the heretofore undisturbed waters. I suppose they must take the vessel for just an immensely exaggerated sea-monster of an inimical character, since practically every moving thing they meet in the sea is the latter, and I do not suppose that they possess much power of discrimination, as far as mere size goes. But see over yonder ! A mass of black, fish-shaped, rises majestically in mid-air. It is nearly ten miles away, but its outlines are well and clearly defined, as is also the snowy commotion in the sea when it falls. Again, and again, and again, in slow sequence, the feat is performed. It is the hump-

backed whale, full of fun, and frolic, and power, exhibiting at once his might and joy of living by hurling his vast bulk skywards. But to our regret his frolicsome mood is soon over ; he does not care, apparently, to exhibit his prowess to any extent, and so is gone.

And now, nearing noon, it would appear as if the few sea-folk of whom we are privileged to make the acquaintance, the distant acquaintance in a ship of this kind, have agreed to remove themselves far from our ken, leaving us in undisturbed solitude, as far as our immediate aerial and oceanic environment is concerned. Not a solitary petrel, or porpoise, or flying fish comes to break the vast loneliness of sea and sky with some appearance of animated nature. It needs the informed imagination to see, with mental vision, the teeming busy life beneath that apparently lifeless surface just agitated by the steady breeze, to realize how in every drop of that incalculable mass of water there dwells a busy colony of beings playing an active, useful part in the great economy of the ocean.

And now the sun is in the meridian, his lambent beams dart down their fervent glow, and involuntarily those whose position does not compel them to brave the celestial fire seek shade, and yield themselves to the gentle languor induced by the caressing warmth. The time is

unfavourable to exertion, except of necessity ; it makes for complete rest of mind and body, if only one be privileged to yield to its gentle invitation. The necessary meals are taken perfunctorily, yet not without a certain decorous appetite ; but each seems to heave a sigh of relief upon returning to the upper deck and the cool side. Still sky and sea wear their bright beaming smile, still the fleecy cloudlets sail imperceptibly over the shimmering blue as the sun begins his majestic descent adown that glorious slope to the western verge of ocean and heaven. The air grows cooler, and a gentle increase in the breeze makes the wavelets grow and frolic joyously, in contrast to their sedate motion of the earlier portion of the day.

Now there are a few more clouds and a decided sense of the ebbing of day's tide, albeit where the oblique beams of the sun strike full upon the face they seem to have lost none of their heat. But, as if with accelerating pace, the sun nears the horizon, and the sky begins to glow with the astounding pageantry of sunset. All the pomp and glory of evening is preparing for the closing miracle of the day. There is a tender freshness in the air, a sense of subdued joy, placid of enjoyment. The cumulous clouds take a sombre hue, almost black, in strange contrast with their fleecy whiteness of a few moments ago. And between them the sky, low down towards the horizon, assumes

that wonderfully soft shade of green that partakes of both blue and orange, yet is not either, a tint so pleasing, so restful to the eye, that it soothes and lulls the other senses like soft music sweetly played. The higher clouds grow rosy as the upward streaming rays from the disappearing sun catch them, and, as at dawn, streamers of all glorious hues flame across the deepening violet of the sky. Veiled in a close canopy of cloud, as if entering the Holiest of all, the sun sinks below the horizon, and it is hard, indeed, even with our knowledge, to believe that but a little way westward he is still beaming upon the world, while beneath our feet weary souls are anxiously awaiting his appearance to dispel the morbid ghoulish fancies of their long sleepless night.

Rapidly the glow fades from the sky, for if the glory of a tropical sunset be great, it is very brief ; the last faint streamers of colour disappear, only an almost blood-red horizontal streak of light remaining till the last, close to the western verge. That, too, dies into deepest violet, and looking up we see with almost a start of astonishment that all the majestic constellations are shining forth, as if suddenly lit by an Almighty hand. There is no moon visible, but the sea is aflame with phosphorescence, the effect of which upon the eye is to darken the sky still more. So look-

ing up suddenly to the westward, where now no cloud can be seen, we may catch sight of that mysterious, almost awful cone of light-shadow which, without knowing aught of its origin or reason of being, men have agreed to call the Zodiacal Light.

Day is done and sweet night succeeds, and soon, lulled by the delicate freshness in the air, we feel drawn sleepwards, whither we willingly go with just a tinge of regret shading our satisfaction, because eager as we have been so to do, we have not appreciated more than a tithe of the miraculousness of a perfectly fine day at sea.



III

The Sailor's Night

WITH monotonous frequency of late the dwellers on shore, whether in low-lying districts, high open country, or sheltered vale, have alike felt the whole entity protest against the savage persistency of persecution evidenced by the elements.

All varieties of discomfort seem to have combined to worry the patient citizen who suffers according to his degree, but who, whatever his station, feels constrained to admit that his endurance is drawing near its limit. And yet, if we would only realize it, how helpful it would be to us all to understand that certain of our workers, the most indispensable of them in fact, must come to look upon the state of things which we so much deplore as normal, only to be expected, and in no wise to be made a fuss about. And when we compare our lot with theirs, it is impossible for us to feel otherwise than shamefaced, the discrepancy is so great.

Wretched indeed is the lot of the worker who,

after buffeting the elements all day, cannot look forward to a weather-tight shelter, a change of clothes, and a good, if homely, meal. Yes ; and at various intervals throughout the day there will be ameliorations in the shape of warming, stimulating food and drink, consumed in comparative comfort. Even the homeless wretch may find these necessaries if he will, although it is a truism that many of the dregs of the population will endure any privation rather than sacrifice one hour of liberty—to freeze, or to starve, as it so often happens.

But the lot of the merchant seaman—more especially in sailing vessels, and lowest of all in the small sailing coasters of our shores that cling so tenaciously to their most precarious positions—is so sordid and trying that it ought, it must do us good, to mitigate our grumbling and increase our patience by the contemplation of it for a little. Take, for instance, the case of a small barque outward bound—off Portland, say. The weather is not bad enough, that is to say it does not blow hard enough, to reduce sail below top-gallant sails, but in every other respect it is atrocious. Incessant rain, only modified occasionally by sleet, continually shifting wind, and thick darkness are its general characteristics.

After a day of severe toil, made so principally by the weather, the watch below from 8 p.m. to

midnight prepare to "turn in." Their apartment is wedge-shaped, right forward where every importunate sea thunders against it for admittance, and along both sides are ranged the "homes" of the men, spaces just a little larger than their coffins will be, if ever they have any. An ordinary man can stand upright between the beams, but while he does so he will find the atmospheric compound up there grip him by the throat and induce vertigo. The odours are of unclean man, steaming clothing and wet oilskins held together by strong tobacco smoke, which probably discourages the various microbes so much that they cannot carry on business. There is no place to dry anything, and the heat is purely animal—any other kind would surely result in suffocation.

Yet sheer weariness overcomes all the forces making for insomnia, and presently in that dismal cave five sailors are temporarily as happy as an infant duchess in her swansdown cradle. But the depth of that first fathomless sleep is rudely plumbed by a most terrific uproar. "All hands shorten sail—look alive!" is roared into the den to the accompaniment of howling wind, thundering canvas, and thrashing spray. The worried vessel staggers uncertainly like a spirited horse overladen and beaten on both sides at once, while every item of her structure groans as if in the throes of dissolution.

In less than five minutes from the time of being called the hardly awakened men are groping their way aloft in the blackness, their just warmed bodies protesting at this sudden change from the damp warmth of the bunk to the full inclemency of that savage gale. Their very vitals shiver, for they are ill-nourished and poorly clad, while the venomous spear-points of the rain seem to find every weak point in a full suit even of good oil-skins. But they cling instinctively to shroud and jackstay, and presently are drawing upon their scanty reserves of strength in conflict with the sails, which seem full of vengeful desire to destroy them. Numbly they succeed in "spilling" the sail, and holding the gathered-up roll with one arm, grope blindly in the blackness beneath the yard for the gasket wherewith to secure it. And by the time they have finished handing that sail they are a little better fit for the next, their muscles having settled into the needed positions.

The lashing of the elements, too, has lost some of its power to annoy by constant repetition of it.

But the work goes on too long, and tired bodies respond but languidly to the demands made upon them by willing if somewhat muddled brains. Moreover, there is a sense of deep grievance. The watch below is slipping away with marvellous celerity, and with it all chance of rest and shelter for another four hours, or until 4 a.m. Under

these circumstances it induces a feeling of sympathy for those poor wastrels who growl under their breath, "Let the — sail blow away ; I ain't goin' t' kill myself." Also a feeling of intense admiration for those who, usually the majority, keep doggedly toiling on, refusing to acknowledge the body's rebellion until the task is done, and well done.

At last a voice is heard from out of the darkness aft. "That'll do the watch," repeated sullenly by the men of the watch below, who mutter afterwards, "'Spose 'taint worth while turning in agen." Now would be the time for hot tea or coffee ; or, even in spite of teetotalism, a tot of grog, for the vital forces of those men are at a low ebb, and they have the immediate prospect before them of four hours' exposure to the relentless weather, even if no work be a-doing. But the only item of comfort available is a smoke, and a change into day clothing for those whose meagre wardrobe has not yet been exhausted. That contingency during a steady run of dirty weather is bound to come soon, and I very well remember our third mate in the *Columbus* informing me that he had just put on his twelfth and last change. We in the forecastle had not known the feel of dry clothing for a fortnight.

The pipes are barely smoked out when the bell strikes, and sticking a quid of tobacco in his

cheek the man whose trick it is at the wheel goes aft, the lookout man mounts the top-gallant forecastle, and the rest of the watch stand by under the lee of such erections as will shield them from the hissing spindrift and the incessant rain. They account themselves happy if they need only just suffer the passage of the hours without being of necessity kept on the go, for they feel wet less while quiet.

Happier still if they can cultivate successfully a Chinese-like absence of mental travail, of self-commiseration, and jealous recollection of what a comfortable bed ashore with a certainty of all night in means. Even the wretched little hole in the mephitic forecastle looms before them more invitingly than does the cosy carpeted chamber, with its large white bed and every comfortable accessory, to some of us, ingrates that we are. And they think most savagely of the lucky (?) beggars snoring away there below, who have not had their watch's rest broken into.

The long, weary watch comes to an end. As the relieved ones hurry below hardly a word is uttered. Just the outer garments are shed, and in ten minutes they have attained a temporary Nirvana, while the watch on deck, even amid their shivering hatred of their lot, feel some alleviation in the prospect of scalding coffee close at hand—does not the fragrance of the beans

being energetically ground in the galley give potent promise of that much-needed refreshment ? And while partaking of it there is a temporary abatement of the weather's malignity, a watery sun gleams through the rifted masses of leaden cloud at the edge of the horizon, and tongues are loosened. There is even a gleam of hope that "we might get a slant down-Channel after this." No higher do their aspirations soar ; such minor details (to us) as a comfortable breakfast, a newspaper, and a definite task for the day just commencing are not in their programme.

Methinks it would modify greatly our querulous complaints of the weather and its effects upon our lives could we occasionally sample the delights of an ordinary night at sea.



IV

“There go the Ships”

STANDING upon the extreme verge of St. Catherine’s Point this bright, biting morning, the words of the old Psalmist came with extreme vividness to my mind. I do not pause to consider whether he in the fields of Palestine ever saw a ship or not, save in the poetic mirror of his wonderful mind, or whether, if he did see what he called ships they were about on a par with the fishing smacks of to-day. Sufficient that he used this pregnant phrase which, occurring to any of us who know the sea, even in the quietest of inland villages, will suffice to bring before us a series of pictures unmatchable for beauty and interest in all the wide world beside.

There go the ships. First, because she will soon be gone for ever ; note yonder labouring old brigantine. Her hull was modern, and considered a triumph of the shipbuilder’s craft, half a century ago. What a to-do they made of her when she was launched from the slips in that salt little coast town, to be sure. She was al-

most the sole topic of conversation for a week, and the youth of the place were nearly rabid with envy of the two boys who had succeeded in getting a berth in her. Her master would hardly have changed places with a king, so proud and satisfied was he at being chosen to command her. And now, how wearily she seems to trudge the boisterous channel seas, like some aged farm labourer lifting his heavily-shod feet in the loamy furrows, her grimy, patched sails slatting as she stumbles along. Everything about her spells poverty and decay, but her name—and that jars unpleasantly as being in the nature of a sarcasm—the *Bonny Kate*, of Poole. Just an old collier, that has been able to secure a cargo for some little coast port, a cargo not worth a steamship's while to look at; there she goes, and a blessing go with her for old sake's sake. But, see, here comes an even more pathetic object if possible, especially to one who has known her in her day of glory. Even under that towering deckload of deals, as high as her shearpoles, and in spite of the “Norwegian House Flag” (windmill pump) which twirls in melancholy fashion, and sends a thin stream of water out of a lee-scupper, I can recognize my old ship the *Conqueror*. And I feel something that a large-hearted hunting man might who should suddenly come across in the crowded streets of a busy town a once favourite

hunter of his toiling along with strained knees and cracked hoofs in the shafts of a coal wagon. Her once tall, tapering masts (she carried sky-sails in those days) are razed till she only spreads top-gallant sails ; her splendid jibboom, whereon she used to spread four head sails, is docked to a stump, and altogether she presents a piteous spectacle. She symbolizes the decline and fall of the sailor. In the day of her pride fifty prime seamen sprang at the sound of the bo’sun’s pipe ; now eight starvelings do what they can, and leave the rest to luck. Yet, so staunchly was she built, and so well cared for in those far-off days, that for years she has been doing this tremendous work of timber droguing across the Atlantic, and is yet sound and fit as ever, if only she could get fair play. I feel that I have seen a ghost redolent of the old romance, and I would that she had been laid long ago.

Another sailing-ship—surely they are unusually plentiful to-day ? But this one still flies the red ensign of England ; still bravely holds on to the few remnants of her once splendid trade. She is one of the Australian clippers, known all over the world, who performed feats of sailing without any ostentation, such as the Yankee blowhards of those days never equalled except in talk. She is trim and taut, clean and bright, a delight to a seaman’s eye. But when she makes her num-

ber, and we learn that she is from one of the nitrate ports, a sigh escapes us, for we fully realize what that means. Her Australian trade, with its fat profits, is quite gone, and she must needs, for all her brave appearance, go groping about the ports where nonperishable low-freight-paying cargo is to be had, taking what she can get, and being as thankful for it as she can. Of course, it is childish and useless to bemoan the stride of progress, and, indeed, I would be the last one to do it ; but I do not feel culpable in giving a regretful thought to the passing of those great yacht-like clippers, beautiful as a dream, where they bred sailors of the real type, and whose deeds are still the talk of sailors wherever two or three are gathered together.

Yet one more, a sailing-ship, with five masts, each carrying a veritable mountain of canvas. No, seamanship is not dead, if men can handle that awful monster, especially the handful that she is certainly carrying. She flies the French flag, one of those vessels built to earn subsidies wrung from the thrifty French people, under the mistaken impression that they are assisting to rehabilitate France's decayed mercantile marine. Her advent, and that of those like her, have hastened the going of English sailing-ships, though what amount of energy, skill, and enterprise on the part of a British sailing-ship owner can avail

against the competition of vessels that can carry cargoes for nothing, and yet, by reason of the mileage subsidy, yield a profit to their owners ? And such a cargo as she can take, too ! Between eight and nine thousand tons of grain home from San Francisco in less than four months, without a penny of expense for engines or coal, and with a crew all told of less than forty. She represents the worst, hardest side of a sailor's calling—let her go, the great, oversparred, undermanned brute !

The breeze freshens, and a nasty little lop gets up. The gulls begin to soar, and draw nearer the land ; there is dirty weather coming, surely. And there goes, loaded to her scuppers, a thousand ton cargo-boat, grim, devoid of ornament, the helot of the sea. There's a black lookout ahead, but she plunges forward to meet it as if urged by some dread fate. Already, at intervals, she drives her blunt nose beneath an oncoming wave, which lollops over the bows and streams aft in a foaming flood. Oh ! toiler at the loom, in the machine shop, in the furrow, or in the mine, think, if you can, for a moment of the lot of her crew. The watch on deck consists of an officer on the bridge, a man on the lookout (who is on the bridge too, for there is no other safe lookout place for him), the man at the wheel, and one other, who is paddling about in the icy-cold water,

precariously attending to such duties as must be performed, and dimly wondering what kind of an infernal time they are going to have to-night. But never in their wildest dreams do any of them suppose that there is any possibility of their putting in for shelter. Oh, no ! drive her out into the black night and the jaws of the blinding gale, for dividends must be earned, times are hard, and time is precious. Toiling gnomes below, see to it that you keep a full head of steam, for upon it all your lives may depend to-night. Go on, and God be with you, unconsidered men of the sea.

There go the ships ; yes, and with relief I notice that these two are something better fitted to face the night that is coming, likely to yield a trifle more comfort to watch below as well as watch on deck. Uncouth, almost brutal, in the severity of their huge outlines, they seem to scorn the trivial channel seas. For one thing, they are flying light, being outward bound. A visible sign of Britain's great prosperity, according to some ideas, that the majority of her ships shall leave her shores in ballast and return deep-laden. Each of these ships will carry in her spacious holds the produce of a county in grain, the cattle and sheep from a hundred hills. They are not fast, they just grind along at an even ten-knots or so, but they look as if they could keep that up

all round the world, as, indeed, some of them do, in mute testimony to the skill of their designers, the integrity of their builders, and the courageous ability of their engineers. Every time-saving, labour-saving appliance is fitted in them, and still they are well-manned. As long as they can keep going, unless, lifting too high to an insistent sea, the propeller emerges from its tremendous thrust at the water, and, flying round suddenly in unresisting air, she carries away the shaft, life on board is not too hard. There are many worse places to be found than even the stokehold of such vessels. Moreover, they are indispensable. Without their constant service in bearing to us the food from other lands, we must starve. Therefore, in spite of the shock their ungainly snub-nosed, tank-built shapes may give to the aesthetic sense, in spite of our dislike to their befouling the clean sky with their inky trails of smoke from the cheap coal they burn, let us gratefully bid them and their gallant crews God-speed and pleasant days.

There go the ships. Ah, there, indeed, go some ships that are a pure delight. Built regardless of cost, their fittings in no wise inferior to those of some great hotel, their speed equal to and far more reliable than that of some railways I could name, but need not—there go a couple of liners. Here we may indeed feel exultant when we see

to what a pitch of perfection man's skill and courage have brought ocean travel. Here is that which will reconcile us to the loss we feel at the passing of the sailing-ship. We can feel proud to belong to the country that builds such ships, that owns such numbers of them, and that so faithfully, regularly produces the men to handle them. To my mind there is something intensely fascinating in the sight of a great liner, by day or by night, gliding along at her accustomed steady twenty or twenty-two miles an hour, with such apparent ease that it gives little or no hint of the mighty forces conspiring to drive the vast fabric through the water at such speed. To think, too, of the great company on board, housed in comfort, fed luxuriously, borne safely across the trackless ocean for thousands of miles. Only to meditate upon it for a little should do us good, and, better still, should give us an ardent desire to remember for good the men who perform this miracle year after year, until old age compels them to lay down the sextant, and betake themselves into the quiet obscurity of some country home. Of one thing I am sure, which is : That no more profitable way for a landsman to spend a leisure hour could be found than a quiet meditation upon the modern meaning of "There go the ships."

V

By Land and Sea

“WHO wouldn’t sell a farm and go to sea ?” To-night, on many a strange and remote sea, that ironical question is being asked by seamen of one another, by seamen of themselves, by men who have never seen a farm, nor know at all of what a farmer’s life is built up. The old question comes forcibly to me to-night, as in mid-harvest time I sit at my window in this remote Cambridgeshire village. I hear the howling of the wind among the barren fruit-trees, strangely reminiscent of the surf upon lonely beaches I visited in bygone years ; I note the lashing of the rain upon the windowpanes, and hear the steady rush of the torrent from the eaves, and I wonder, after all, if some would not sell their farms, presupposing buyers, and go to sea. But while I wonder thus the rain suddenly ceases, the wind, as if weary of striving, tired of destroying, lulls to a calm, the gloomy pall of cloud above grows thin in places, and a pallid moon peeps through. A

delicious autumn scent arises from the storm-beaten plants, and also an aroma of hope. It will be a fine day to-morrow, and perhaps the crops are not so much damaged as we feared. Let us turn over and go to sleep. We shall not be called out at midnight to gaze upon an interminable waste of waters heaving disconsolately under the grey sky, nor shall we know, whatever our station, the misery of a forecastle breakfast. It is better here.

Naturally, I feel considerable trepidation in venturing upon so utterly strange a field (to me) as that of country life in print. I can only hope that those well-versed people who read these errant papers will remember the limitations of a sailor, will, when coming athwart some grotesque blunder, feel that perchance that is how the matter would strike a sailor, and, above all, believe that I utterly disclaim any idea of being didactic or dogmatic, or any other ic that carries with it the insulting idea of pedantic.

My true intent is all for your delight,

and that only. As to bucolic business generally, is it not recorded on the tablets of my memory how once in the interval between ship and ship I accepted a berth upon an up-country New Zealand farm, and realized, in the most complete fashion, how utterly futile a farmer's assistant I was ? Shall

I ever forget my shameful failure in the matter of milking a cow ? How, after anchoring her fore and aft with halters found in the stable, I assaulted her udder, and pulled and pulled without extracting one drop from her almost overflowing teats. How my mistress came with many words and released my victim, sitting down upon the stool before my astonished eyes, and immediately eliciting a double stream of milk without any apparent effort. But when, turning scornfully to me, she said, "Now you see how it's done ; go on and do it," she waited my obedience ; how complete, how gross was my discomfiture, for apparently Poley's springs dried up automatically. Milk I got none. The memory of that complete failure is ever with me, and will effectually prevent me from ever pretending to full knowledge of any one branch of farming or gardening, or any one phase of country life generally. Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that it can in nowise hinder me from enjoying country life to the full, cannot prevent me from sympathizing most heartily with neighbouring farmers in their many trials, or feeling the most intense admiration for the sturdy, manful way in which they scorn defeat by any of Nature's vagaries, and after each new disappointment, mutter an honest grumble or so, and then go on as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. They always remind me of a

jingle current among the negroes in the Southern States when I was a boy, and the chances of my roving life flung me among those irrepressible darkies :—

I'll scratch an' fight, an' gouge an' bite,
An' tumble in de mud ;
Till all de groun' fer miles aroun'
Am kivered wid my blood.
An' w'en I fine dat I am lick'
I neber will gib in ;
But res' myse'f, and ketch my bref,'
And den go in agin."

But to a sailor who has learned to use his eyes, life in an English country village is full of poignant delights. His mind is continually contrasting the scenes wherein his present most peaceful lot is cast, and those so vividly impressed upon his memory. Each has its own perfect charm, totally differing, yet all delightful.

For instance, the live stock. All sailors are born pet-makers. There never yet was an animal or bird allowed to run loose or fly freely about a ship that did not presently become tame, no matter how uncouth or unlikely a pet it appeared. As for cocks and hens, geese, turkeys, goats, sheep, cows, and pigs, these delightful domestic animals are always immense favourites. And horses, although a sailor's acquaintance with them must necessarily be of the smallest ; give him but a chance to know them and see how soon

he will become as full of horse-sense as any stud-groom. The vegetable world, too, is to a sailor a never-failing source of delight. It is a region that has always been just beyond his ken, his experience of growing crops having usually been limited to a crop of mustard and cress raised on a flannel-covered lime-juice bottle suspended by rope-yarns attached to a plate, also covered with flannel, on which it stands. How carefully he apportions its share of precious water deducted from his exiguous three quarts, and with what intensity of delight he champs the pungent produce. Your sailor is your true vegetarian. Not a slave to strange, unholly messes, reeking of coco-nut oil, but fresh potatoes, turnips, onions, cabbage ; these are to him joys unspeakable, especially if they are moistened with a little gravy. The meat becomes quite a secondary consideration. And eggs—think of it, ye dwellers in the beautiful country, who often go back on eggs, and say that you are sick of them. The sailor often goes for years and never sees one except the shop variety, of doubtful antiquity and high flavour. Do I not remember the almost insane delight with which my chum in the *Brinkburn*, who had made a special pet of one quaint old hen until it used to stalk into the forecastle after him, and, perching upon his shoulder, watch every morsel he put into his mouth at meals,

showed me an egg which his pet had laid in his bunk. Fifteen of these precious ovoids were deposited in the same nook, and never a cackle did Dame Partlet emit, as if she fully understood that this little matter was solely between herself and her friend, and of not the slightest moment to anybody else. I grieve to say that these loving bonds were rudely severed by the steward one day slaying the hen for the cuddy dinner. This perfectly legitimate, and indeed unavoidable, act on the steward's part secured for him a terrible thrashing from my bereaved chum, who was promptly put in irons therefor. He deserted in Rangoon, and I never saw him again; but I know that it would be very long before his blighted affections again blossomed.

But, as a conclusion to this brief and rambling paper, I would say that in my humble opinion this meticulous affection of the sailor for his protégés, whether animal or vegetable, must effectually prevent him from ever being a successful agriculturist or stock-raiser, in that he does not obtain that broad grasp of his subject, and that detachment from the sentimental side of his business, which I think is the hall-mark of a good and prospering farmer.

VI

A Memory

TO-NIGHT the wild west wind is howling across these pleasant Cambridgeshire levels, moaning among the closely clustered trees of the surrounding orchards with a note curiously reminiscent of the long monotonous roll of breakers upon an entirely exposed beach. Overhead the low-packed scud is flying, showing at brief intervals the pale watery disc of the moon. And a sharp lashing of rain occasionally against the windows simulates wonderfully the wind-whipped spray snatched from the summits of breaking waves. One thing, however, refuses to lend itself to sea-illusion, the sweet odour of ripening vegetation, sharply different from the keen ozone of the sea atmosphere. Also the twittering of disturbed birds nestling in the ivy on the front wall of the house introduces a note that has in it nothing of the belated sea-bird's scream as it wanders over the foaming sea like a forlorn ghost.

But somehow the thought will persist in mak-

ing itself felt, that I am not snugly housed in this fair inland county of rural England, but cowering beneath an upturned boat on the exposed strand of a coral atoll, one of a distressed crew who have only just succeeded in escaping with their lives from the wreck of their ship. The thirty-four years which have elapsed between the occurrence which will be remembered and to-night, fall away as fell the blossoms from my fruit-trees under the biting frosts of our terrible spring, and I cannot realize myself as I am, but only as I was. For some time I continue the attempt to remember that the first immense event in my life, the first time that I realized that I was assisting at a dramatic representation of one of the most interesting happenings common to man upon the sea was so far back (to be precise, in 1869) that it ought to be but a dim and shadowy memory only. Quite uselessly I thus strive until I relinquish the attempt, and yield submissively to the glamour of the hour. All my surroundings fade away, and I am just arousing from my hard little straw mattress, in the bunk underneath the steward's, at the clamour of kicking the door of our narrow berth. Sleepily the steward commands me to rise and "see what's up." Sulkily I obey, not daring to refuse, and opening the door am confronted by the white scared face of the helmsman, who almost screams

at me, "The ship's ashore." Happily I do not at all recognize the dread significance of his words, and reply with some piece of childish insolence, which, so great is his terror, he does not notice.

But the steward, hurriedly dragging on his clothes behind me (I am always dressed), orders me to go and find the skipper, the watch on deck. Where can they be ? What are they doing ? Now I begin to feel important, and nimbly dart off into the darkness bawling, "The ship's ashore!" with all the shrill strength of my lungs. Out of the gloom shadowy figures begin to emerge, sleepily asking why they are thus rudely disturbed. And no one knows whose watch on deck it is ; there is utter confusion, while guiding voice of officer there is none. I find the captain at last, prone on his back, his mouth wide open, emitting stertorous noises. He is on watch, the second mate being on the sick list. By the time I have pinched, pulled, and kicked him (with bare feet only) into consciousness, all hands are anxiously awaiting directions. They do not receive any. The brain that should control them is so bemused that it can give no guidance, and the disciplinary instinct in the crew is too strong to allow of the reins being taken out of those helpless hands. So while the gale roars overhead, and the hungry breakers cover us in hissing vortices of foam, we stand about wonder-

ing what the end will be. With the light comes a revelation of our position. Truly a wild picture of desolation. Far to seaward spread the foaming breakers, telling the most ignorant of us that however we got into our present position, we, that is the ship, shall never leave it as a ship. To starboard a range of black jagged rock-points protruding from the breakers like broken teeth from a foaming mouth. And behind them just a patch of white sand with a few scattered boulders on its remote side.

But as the day grows the weather becomes a little better, and an effort is made to find a way of escape to that little patch of firm sand. And it is crowned with success, for the usual opening is found into the atoll, and through it all hands are safely carried in two crazy boats, leaving our poor old ship broken in twain amidships. Provisions and water, too, have been saved, and although the outlook is grim and barren enough, there is a solid sense of satisfaction in missing that agonized quiver of our late floating home as the monstrous waves buffeted her without her having any chance of yielding gracefully to their impact, and of being obliged to stay and be battered to pieces. Night is falling fast, so is a pitiless cold rain, and our blood, chilled by long abiding in the fierce tropical heats of Mexico, courses but sluggishly through our arteries.

So with shivering bodies and chattering teeth we set about making a rude shelter by turning the boats over. But there is not room for all, and some, myself among them, are fain to scoop holes in the sand, burrow in them like rabbits, and pulling such garments over us as we have, set our teeth and prepare to endure the misery of the long night. For my part, the solid satisfaction of being ashore compensated for much hardship ; I felt so safe. And amid the pouring of the rain and howling of the storm I slept.

Only a little while though, for suddenly a rush of water aroused me, and disentangling my head from its clinging covering with an awful sense of doom at my heart, saw that the breakers, having overleaped the fringing reef-barrier, were hurling themselves ever higher upon our tiny refuge. Already the upturned boats had been rolled over again, and their bewildered occupants were struggling blindly in the darkness, which was only relieved by the glare of the encroaching waves, to save their coverings and their shelter. Then, being but a small boy, and without any brave spirit to buttress my fainting one, I felt a strange desire to struggle no longer, but just to lie still and let the conquering sea add my small item to its long list of spoils. For with (as I afterwards found) all my shipmates, I felt sure that the island was about to be submerged. But some

of the stouter souls, disdaining to yield thus easily to death, bestirred themselves and dragged the boats out of the grasp of the sea up to a slight eminence. There they upturned them again, and after an hour's most anxious vigil, during which the still steady down-rush of the rain was not even noticed, every one saw for certain that the breakers had ceased to advance. So all hands wedged themselves into the shelter in some mysterious way, and steaming with the accumulated heat of the closely packed bodies acting upon their soaking clothes were soon asleep.

As I have been sitting at this open window, lulled off by the monotonous complaint of the wind among the trees; so now, waking with a start, I feel sundry twinges of pain as I did on that never-to-be-forgotten morning, a rough chunk of coral seemingly having bored a hole in my back, while all my limbs were cramped and aching from the combined effects of packing and steaming. But what a privilege to be able to sleep at all under such circumstances, and feel no ill effects afterwards ! The sun leaps up out of the sea, and floods the world with warm light, transfiguring the unutterably dreary surroundings of the night before, and lighting again the torch of hope. Under that beneficent glow romance revives, and the sensation of having been in some measure the hero of a real adventure

compensates for the ills of the past night, already fading from recollection. All kinds of interests crowd in to occupy thought and stimulate wonder, the birds, the fish, the wreckage, and, later on, the turtle. And presently I am full of the thoughtless happiness of a boy again.

VII

Monotony

IT is really astonishing how many points of resemblance one may find between sea life and village life after a lengthened experience of the two, with a considerable time of town dwelling sandwiched between them. Of course, there are some inevitable and well-marked differences, but, speaking broadly, there is much similarity. For instance, how many and bitter are the complaints made by both villagers and sailors of the monotony of their lives. This complaint is a sure index of the badly furnished minds of the utterer, for in neither life should there be any monotony. There are all too few hours in the day wherein to wonder and worship in the country or on board ship, but I will admit that it is not so easy to find subjects of interest at sea as it is in the country. At sea more than anywhere else people need to be educated into seeing, taught what to look for, what to admire. Nature does not wear her heart on her sleeve at sea as she

does in the country. Moreover, the higher enjoyment derived from contemplation of the ocean fauna is scarcely possible to any one under the rank of an officer, and not even to him in a steamer. Opportunities of getting fully in contact with one's environment at sea on board a steamer are sadly to seek. They are indeed mostly confined to harbours where there are no wharves and the vessel must anchor out in a bay or a roadstead, and then all day, except Sunday, is taken up with work ; there is no watch below in which to cultivate the acquaintance of the sea and its wonders manifold. Yet it will be found that even under these prosaic and unfavourable circumstances some men will rise superior to their limitations, will persist in giving the divine spark within them full play, full access to the sweet influences around, instead of callously allowing it to become extinguished beneath a heavy cement of animalism and worse than brutal indifference. I well remember how in a steamer, of which as a boy I was lamp-trimmer, when trading between Sydney, N.S.W., and Auckland, N.Z., I used to feel deep sympathy for the slaves of the stokehold, as I considered them. They laboured under the best conditions possible to their terrible task, had the best of food and wages, at least double those they would have received at home ; but still I felt that any lot

was preferable to theirs, and I did not wonder that they were a reckless, drunken set of men, whenever they could get the chance so to be. Yet one of them, a Londoner of about thirty, who was slowly dying of consumption, to which dread scourge these men are of course particularly liable, interested me more than all the rest. For in the brief intervals between his spells of savage roasting toil he would climb up and sit on the fidley, gazing out upon the sea in apparently a happy waking dream. One day I ventured to ask him what he was looking at so steadfastly. Turning slowly towards me, with the far-away look in his eyes reluctantly fading, he said, quietly : "I'm enjoying the glory of the sea an' the sky, the clouds, an' the winds, an' the waves." Then, his few minutes of respite being expired, he descended again to the inferno that claimed him. Afterwards, when we became more intimate, he did much to open my purblind eyes to the splendours of the world around us, and I enjoyed several excursions with him to Botany Bay, where he just abandoned himself to Nature like a tired child to the arms of its mother. He died at sea shortly after, laid by his request on the deck forward where he could feast his eyes on the loveliness of the sunset, sinking to his own rest as the short twilight faded, and just as peacefully.

And I have met sailors, though I will admit

they have been but few, who have found an inexpressible delight in the myriad changes of the aspect of sea and sky, who, without any microscope or natural history knowledge, would gaze delightedly for a considerable portion of their watch below upon the contents of a drawbucket of sea-water, examine every frond and cranny of a mass of sea-weed, or sitting on the martingale guys beneath the bowsprit on a fine day, just watch what a casual, unthinking observer would call the barren sea. These men were far better fitted to endure hardships than their fellows, although of so much finer, more sensitive, tissue. For in all Nature they found something to admire, and so moved in a plane remote from many of the more material worries of life which glanced over them almost unnoticed. But I never found them bad or careless workmen. Their romantic natures seem to scorn the baseness of doing as little, and that little as badly as possible without suffering therefor.

Now in the village it seems to me that the opportunities of the individual are far greater for that intimacy with Nature which is so valuable, the justice of the complaint of monotony far less than it is at sea. During certain seasons of the year the hours of labour are long, and the need for rest greater out of those hours ; but taking the year round, the villager has privileges

of recreation, time for self-improvement, such as never come in the way of the seaman before the mast. But oh ! the pity of it ! the pity of it ! Groups of youths stand in the middle of the cross-roads for long hours when not at work, weekdays and nearly all day Sunday, mind and body absolutely inert. Feeble, inane talk—it were a shame to call it conversation—passes from one vacant mind to another. A passing stranger is a sweet boon, for the open mouths and eyes, wherein is no speculation, turn ox-like after him or her. The time of arrival of the trains (two or three) on the Sunday is the signal for a slouching departure for the railway station, where for half an hour or so the platform is so crowded that a stranger would imagine that the railway traffic was exceedingly heavy. But a few minutes after the train has shed and picked up its half dozen passengers, under the stolid, gaping scrutiny of the crowd, the whole contingent loiters back again to its post to loaf and gape until bedtime. Where are the elder men ? Far too many are in the village alehouses, sitting in dim taprooms, and exchanging an occasional well-worn idea. But still a good many of them are usefully and pleasantly employed in their gardens, where the need for plenty of vegetables to supplement the scanty food they are able to buy does not prevent them from cultivating flowers. These men

are well on the road to the higher appreciation of life, and seldom complain of monotony.

The women-folk corresponding to this class of workers are hardly bestead. What with the home duties and the outdoor work, they have little time to spend in self-instruction or enjoyment. It is, then, little wonder that the futile and exasperating (to the subject) village gossip becomes to them their only recreation, except their church or chapel. For here, as in most other places, it is the women-folk who are the stay of the religious part of the community. Were it not for the women, all the churches would die for lack of support. It is painful though, to see, how in search of escape from that monotony of which they complain, the young folks drift away to the great cities, and fall an easy prey to that most hideous of all existences, where every moment not needed for work or sleep is spent in aimless parading of the streets, listening to lewd talk, and tippling in glaring public houses. Considering the immense aggregate of philanthropic effort to counteract this curious tendency of our young people of the respectable labouring classes, the condition of our streets at night and on Sundays gives much food for anxious thought. Yet such is the mysterious glamour which this noisy nerve-wearing street life casts over its victims, that to it the village youths and girls look forward as

to some splendid goal, and, once having come under its influence, they seldom return to the monotonous life of the village. Passing strange, is it not, that minds should be thus beclouded ? So to prefer the utterly monotonous, utterly aimless, utterly harmful wandering in the crowded streets of a great town to the sweet, healthful, and even interesting life of the country. Especially now, when villages where books and the daily papers and helpful, unpaid teachers are to be found. I feel firmly persuaded that the most fruitful idea for the stay of the mental and moral and physical degeneration of the race is Back to the Land.

VIII

Village Health

THERE is a matter which has been troubling me greatly since I took to country life, for I have as yet found no satisfactory explanation of it. Indeed, I do not think any explanation can be satisfactory. It may supply the reasons for the state of things which I have noticed, but it certainly would show that those reasons ought not to exist. I allude to the general poor health and physique of village folk. I do not wish to touch upon matters outside my province if such there be, but this subject is peculiarly interesting to me from its close analogy to a similar condition of things on board merchant ships, and I shrewdly suspect that the reasons for the sad business are much the same in both cases. Nothing has impressed me more in travelling about the country, even before I settled down to village life myself, than the wretchedly low standard of physical capacity among the rising generation of country people of the labouring classes, especially of women and children. It does not seem to be

confined either to any particular county, but from north to south, east to west, the same lamentable facts are to be noticed. Much food for profound thought may be furnished by a stroll of observation along the platform of a village railway station on a Sunday afternoon or evening when the train of the day is due to arrive. It seems a favourite rendezvous, for the younger people especially, and they are certainly seen then to their best advantage. But no finery, however carefully made and put on, can draw the attention away from the rounded, narrow shoulders, the hollow cheeks, flat chests (of the women), and shockingly bad teeth. Splay feet and resultant shambling gait are painfully frequent, and there is usually a vacant expression in the faces and a giggling, fatuous note in the voices that is very saddening to see and hear.

These discoveries come with a heavy shock to one who has been reading with much alarm the statements made about the decadence of the rising generations in our large cities. But although I am not able to furnish any statistics, I feel perfectly certain that, judged by the standards of health, height, robustness, and intelligence, the labouring classes of London and their children are far superior to those filling a similar station of life in any village of my acquaintance. And I am sure that this decadence is a sign only

made manifest of recent years. The older people are sturdy and healthy-looking, even if their backs are bent with heavy toil. But the children's pale, anaemic faces haunt one. They make one feel ready to demand loudly the whereabouts of the ruddy country youngsters who used to present such a striking contrast to the pale little town-bred plants visiting the country in search of health. Not so very long ago I visited a lovely little village in Wiltshire with my family, four children being with us. We came from East Dulwich, a district of London about the average for health, a little below perhaps where we lived, at the bottom of the valley. But our children were the the only ones in the village who had rosy cheeks, and their appearance was a constant topic of wondering conversation among the villagers, who evinced profound amazement that such healthy children could possibly have been born and bred in London. And this brings me to another fact worthy of notice, which is that as soon as you leave the labouring class you notice a wonderful improvement in health and physical qualifications. What does this suggest ? I do not wish to theorise, but there must be a reason, and I do not think it is far to seek. Before giving what I believe a reason or those reasons to be, I would like to advert for a moment to the condition of things among merchant seamen, not firemen (stokers).

By common consent there is no healthier place in the world to live than on the sea, not even in a country village with a porous soil, plenty of trees, and no marsh-land near. If any proof were needed of this the most cursory study of fishermen, bluejackets, and the crews of coasting and short voyage steamers would furnish it abundantly. But when the crews of vessels making long voyages, sailing vessels, and tramp steamers are examined, we receive a shock. We say, "Can these be sailors?" Not only are they poor in physique, but they have no stamina, are full of ailments, and are worn out at forty. That is, supposing they remain as common seamen. If, however, they succeed in raising themselves out of the forecastle, even if only as high as bo'sun, say at the age of thirty, the deterioration is arrested, and they become, accident of course excepted, stalwart long-lived men, about the best preserved of the community.

Now the reasons for this are very well known, although it is only fair to say that they are strenuously denied by, *nota bene*, interested people. Ships' forecastles are, speaking generally, the worst-ventilated of all living places occupied by men of our race. And personal cleanliness, at least, in sailing-ships, is almost an impossibility for the foremast hand. Lastly, the food is generally innutritious, badly prepared, and mono-

tonous in character. Naturally, I should be expected to add the sailors' own well-known disregard of his health while ashore—his drinking, etc. ; but while I fully admit the evil, I maintain that its effects upon him are trivial, lasting as these outbursts do such a very short time, while the three baneful influences I have quoted are the normal conditions of his whole life. When he rises, if only to petty officer, the conditions of his life that make for health are completely changed. He has better food, a better lodging, kept clean and ventilated, and his facilities for personal cleanliness are not only increased, but necessity is laid upon him to keep clean even if he be not so inclined. Now the natural goodness of his calling makes itself felt, having got a fair chance to do so, and he becomes a sturdy, vigorous man, who was before fast falling into decrepitude.

Unless I have been unusually obscure, my analogy between the sailor and the villager will now be apparent. With the best possible surroundings of pure air, abundant sunshine, fresh scents of flowers and fields, the villager lives quite half his time in a poisonous atmosphere at home. His or her sleeping apartment is usually so stuffy and foul that upon entering it from the fresh air one has usually a slight attack of giddiness ; and as the air is shut out, so is the sunshine and even the light, as if they were two of the most noxious

evils, instead of the most powerful factors making for health. And to such a pitch does the villager carry this antipathy to ventilation that in travelling about by train I have continually to plead for a little bit of one carriage window to be left open. Often I have been sitting contentedly in a compartment alone with both windows open wide, and, on stopping at some village station, several labouring men and women have entered. Their first action is invariably to close both windows, the next to close the ventilators (if they understand them), and the next to befoul still further the stagnant atmosphere with the fumes of cheap shag tobacco. Being remonstrated with they reply sheepishly that they do not want to catch cold !

But I do not think that this curious dislike to fresh air in their homes, bad and unhealthy as it undoubtedly is, furnishes the sole reason for the decadence of village health. I cannot speak very positively, only having made a few timid inquiries, but I am quite convinced in my own mind that the average villager is badly nourished. Either he cannot get food, or does not know what to get, or does not understand its preparation. But everything about the people, especially their teeth, points to malnutrition. And there must also be some reason, if it could only be found, for the alarming spread of cancer in the villages.

Some particular defect in food or water is certainly to blame. Village people give themselves a variety of reasons, some of which tally with the above, and others are hardly reproduceable here, but are based upon the vicious practice of over-crowding, of whole families, mostly grown up, herding in one room.

Whatever the cause may be, if once the facts of decadence in the health and physique of village populations be admitted, no time should be lost in doing something to alter or arrest it. It is quite bad enough to note that the populations of our villages are fast dwindling away, the younger folks making for the towns and never returning, without having those young folks carrying to the slums of our great cities already enfeebled frames incapable of resisting disease. A campaign of fresh air enthusiasts, for instance, would do a lot of good, a series of object-lessons on the use of cheap disinfectants, and the necessity of personal cleanliness, would do more, and some plain talks about food and morality, both for mind and body, would fitly round off the good work that ought to be carried on

IX.

The Postman's Story

ONE morning lately, when looking somewhat disconsolately out across the dim and sodden fields, while the relentless rain fell heavily, I was startled to hear above the moaning of the wind a cheerful lusty voice trolling out the chorus of the well-known sea-chanty, "Sally Brown." In a flash I was transported to Demerara, the glowing glare of the great sun in the intense blue above, the rushing muddy river below, on one side the long line of warehouses and sterlings (wharves), on the other the low-lying jungly shore, and in front of me a happy, toiling band of darkies yelling "Sally Brown" at the pitch of their lungs as they hove in the great hogsheads of sugar. So did I first hear that labour song, and now again, in the heart of England, in this remote village. What could it mean? Just then the gate clanged, as a quaint figure swung through it, crunching the gravel beneath a pair of heavy, clumsy boots, and letting its voice die away in the last cadences of "Way, ayay, roll an' go." It

was the old postman, swathed amazingly against the persistent rain, no sign of uniform visible but his cap, which perched incongruously upon the top of his head. I hailed him with "Below, there!" He immediately responded with a cheery "Aye, aye, sir!" and our acquaintance-ship had begun. That afternoon, the weather having cleared, I waylaid him, returning from his allotment with next day's supply of vegetables in his arms, and in five minutes was deep in his confidence, exchanging with him the argot of the sea. In that short time I learned that he had been a sailor for thirty years—one of the real old shell-backs that are fast becoming extinct—that he had never been in steam or risen higher than A.B., and that he regarded his present position as one to thank God for every day, since it saved him from that inevitable destination of the old foremast hand if he outlives his usefulness—the workhouse.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that our fellowship ripened fast, as we were the only two seafarers for many miles around. There were a few bluejackets who now and then came home, but my old tarpot regarded them with all the scorn of the old *sailor* for those whom he regards as sea labourers merely. And it did not take long to reveal the fact that my old friend was not only an able seaman, but that he had seen many

wonderful things and remembered them, and that his experiences were far from being confined, as usual, to a long series of riotous proceedings in the purlieus of many seaports. One evening, as we sat in the garden swapping reminiscences, he suddenly said : " Tell ye what, sir, the funniest thing as ever happened to me in all my fishin' was when I was 'fore the mast in the old *Nimrod*, of Liverpool, 1,280 ton register, bound to Calcutta with salt. I don't know how it was, but skipper, mate, and second mate was all makin' their fust voy'ge as such, hadn't any of 'em ever filled such a berth afore. Don't often happen like that, does it, sir ? But the petty officers was a fine lot—bo'sun, carpenter an' sailmaker, cook an' stooard. If you'd sorted Liverpool you couldn't have bettered 'em. An' we wasn't half a bad crowd either—twenty-two of us, all told, an' only eight squareheads among the lot. By the big hook block though, she was workus rigged, took two men to haul the slack of the taupsle halliards through a snatch block, an' there wasn't a sail in her 'ud come down in any weather 'thout a couple of hands to overhaul the halliards, or that we could clew up without sendin' a hand aloft to light up the sheets. She was an old East Injieman, built in Maulmein, good enough in her day, of course, but that was long enough afore our time. And we hadn't got to the west'ard

of Cape Clear afore we found that she'd got the dry-rot—got it so bad that you couldn't stick yer knife in a beam 'thout findin' the wood a-crumblin'. The grub was bad, of course, the pantiles being extry so (I lost these two teeth aboard of her trying to eat 'em), but what worried us most was the vermin. She was just a-swarmin' with rats and cockroaches and bugs so's you couldn't hardly sleep. But we was a quiet crowd, an' there wasn't any trouble, the officers being very civil an' apparently pretty well up to their work.

"The weather was pretty bad, of course, bein' about this time of the year, an' we had a lot of fore-reachin' an' hard beatin' in Channel ; but we made the most of every slant, and in a fortnight we'd got her fairly well out, say in about forty-five twenty. She had been makin' a good sup o' water up till then, but nothin' to holler about—say a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes spell every two hours (we'd got pretty good flywheel pumps) ; but now it begun to blow from the N.W. a reg'lar snifter, an' an ugly sea got up surprisin' quick. Her canvas wasn't good either, so we couldn't carry a storm stays'le to steady her, an' she wouldn't lie to with a tarpaulin in the weather mizen-riggin'. So she laid mostly in the trough o' the sea, and tumbled about so much that she racketed herself as loose as a coal basket. An' it soon got to be pump or

sink. We couldn't get a suck out of her, no matter how hard we tried, and somehow the pumps didn't seem to act good either. Everybody tailed on, from the skipper down, only stopping one side occasionally for fresh leathers. We'd give up soundin' her. It was only a waste of time, an' the weather was so bad we dursn't take a hatch off to go down an' see, so we just slogged away for dear life. But gradually it appeared to all of us that, although we never got a sign of a suck, the old hooker seemed to be gettin' livelier instead of deader-like in the water, as she ought to hev done if she'd a been founderin'. An' suddenly the skipper drops the bell-rope on the pump-handle he'd been a pullin' at, an' he shouts, 'My God ! it's the salt ! ' I tell you what—them pumps stopped mighty quick. We had one o' the hatches off like a shot, an' lowered a ridin' light down, down, till it was below the 'tween deck beams, an' there was a white level flood of melted salt. We had pumped most of her cargo out!

"We hauled the light up, an' put the hatch on again quick's we could, an' the skipper tried to get her afore the wind. But it was blowin' so hard that the fore topmast stays'le an' the fore tops'le blew out o' the bolt ropes when we tried to get 'em to pay her head off, an' we had to give it up an' tackle the pumps again. Because, of course, we

didn't know how much she was leakin' or anything, except that if we left off pumpin' she'd founder, an' if we went on pumpin' she'd probably capsize. However, one was certain and the other wasn't, so the skipper decided we'd better go on pumpin'. We started the wagon again, an' the misbul clankety clank clank went on steady hour after hour, while that everlasting gale fair roared overhead. Daylight come at last, thank God, but there was never a vessel in sight. We hoisted a distress signal, however, ensign union down, and got all ready to leave her on the jump, saw all the boats clear, and clothes, etcetera, in 'em.

"An' so that day wore on to afternoon without any sign of improvement, when the skipper calls us who had just been relieved at the pumps down into the saloon to have a tot of grog. I ought to have told you she was a flush deck ship, saloon and fo'c'sle below. While we was takin' our grog something happened. I've felt some queer things in my time but none like that nor never want to again. She was tumbling about pretty lively, but you know, not enough for a sailor man to hold on for 'less he was where he couldn't balance himself, but now she just slung us all like rags from port to starboard, the lights went out, and I felt myself fall bang on top of somebody who yelled frightful. There was a horrible noise louder than the roaring of the sea and a washin' of water all

round, and then came quiet, at least quiet to what it had been. But the dark was awful. I know how I felt as if I was shut up in my coffin, an' not bein' able to bear it any longer I shouted out, 'For God's sake what's happened ?' The skipper's voice replied, 'She must have capsized, Bill.' 'Then, the Lord have mercy on us !' says I, for I couldn't see no way of escape, an' it struck me, too, like a kick it did, that all our poor shipmates what had been on deck was gone. Well, we was in big trouble no doubt, but we was still alive, and if we'd only been able to see, things wouldn't have been so hopeless. But in the dark, and with everything upsy down, we was afraid to move lest we should fall out of the companion into the sea, fortunately the saloon skylights was all battened down.

" Then a fellow sings out, 'The water's a risin', we'll all be drowned here in the dark,' and then he shut up as suddenly as he'd sung out, and all was quiet for half a minute, except for the squeakin' of the rats—there must have been hundreds of 'em swimmin' about, an' I remember feelin' sorry for 'em, poor little creeturs. Suddenly the skipper hollers, 'Thank God, boys, there's a chance yet. I've found the lazareete hatch, an' it's open. Come to me all of ye and climb up through.' An' so we did. Guided by the sound of his voice we all got through into the lazareete, an'

climbed up on top of the stores which had fallen anyhow when she turned over, but fortunately hadn't blocked up the hatchway. An' presently there come streamin' in from somewhere a thin thread o' light—it must have been one of the leaks in the run of her,—an' our eyes gettin' used to it, we could presently make out to see a little and find some cabin biscuit and bottled beer, which revived us. But getting down to the hatch again, we found we hadn't been a bit too soon out of that cabin—the water had filled it completely. Indeed, we felt sure that it would soon swamp us out of our present place, but up till now we was out of its reach.

" Well, sir, if I was to tell you of all we said and thought and done while we was prisoned up in that lazareete—but there, I couldn't. I know that half the time we was off our heads, quite loony all except the skipper. Ah, that was a man, sir. He never lost heart or seemed to think about himself (though I learnt afterwards that he was only just married afore we left), but talked and sung and said pieces of the Bible to us, till we all got like to hang on him as if he was our only hope. And at last after we'd been shut in there over a week, one day when it was as still as death, and the hull hardly movin', we heard voices. On the moment we all shouted at the very pitch of our lungs. Then, far away like, we heard 'Nimrod

ahoy ! anybody aboard ? ' Such a yelling as we set up then—it was enough to deafen a dead man. However, they heard us, and after what seemed a frightful long time, we heard them a choppin' at the counter. It took 'em nearly four hours to cut us out, for the old ship was a mass o' teak beams aft there, but the crowd held on, and we was got out at last. She was the 'Tecumseh', American man-o'-war, and her crowd was that pleased with themselves you can't think for that they had reskied us. We was all very white an' pinched lookin' when we got out, but none the worse for our terrible time. Only—eighteen of our shipmates had been suddenly swept out of existence an' it might just as easily have been us. But I must up stick an' sheer off 'relese my ole woman 'll want to know if I ben waitin' for these here cabbages to grow. So long, sir."

X

The Lonely Vigil

AT no great distance from one of our most perfectly picturesque stretches of coast there is anchored a lightship for the purpose of pointing out and warning passing ships against a most treacherous range of shoals. In the bright days of summer, when the sleeping sea reflects from its softly swelling bosom the many tender lights and smiles of the golden sunshine, the solitary vessel's position would seem to be an ideal one. There is beauty all around her, veiling effectually the terrors of Nature's forces. Landward, the watchkeeper's eye can mark the tall corn growing lustily, the orderly hedgerows bright with flowers, the sturdy trees supporting their burden of ripening fruit. By using his glass, he can even discern the features of his wife and children about the garden of his snug cottage, the infrequent visitor passing along the shady lanes, and the busy gulls driving off the rooks from their common hunting-ground, the farmers' prolific fields. The merciless shoals are merci-

fully hidden, except when a larger swell than usual curdles around the broken summits of the spur of rock running out half-way across the inshore channel, or leaves a stretch of level sand on the bank, gleaming flatly for an instant like a sword-blade laid along the heaving water. The bases of the cliffs that rise perpendicularly from the sea in places are softly caressed by the wavelets, as if in most peaceful dalliance, and there is not a sound discernible at the touch of the incoming swell with the shore.

Seaward, the vessels swim in a glamour of thinnest haze, the lordly liner appearing suspended in the ether, and the long black trails of smoke from her two huge funnels melting softly into the blue above, as if impotent to distain its purity for more than a few fleeting minutes. The few white-sailed craft dependent upon the lazy wind lie restfully, compelled to share in the universal peace. But as the glowing sun glides gently down the western slope of heaven, there appear wisps and wreaths of colours that are crude and harsh. They do not blend with the placid scene at all, and the two silent seamen look stealthily towards one another, with alternate glances at the smoke-spirals from their pipes curling upwards. The same thought is in both their minds —will the other watch, who, in defiance of regulations, have taken advantage of this glorious day

to visit the village, return before the change which is evidently impending takes place ? In the north-east there appears, as if magically summoned into being, a mountain range of sombre cumuli, with black level bases, snowy bodies, and gloomy summits. The pleasant warmth leaves the air, succeeded by a chilly dampness, and the descending sun is suddenly veiled. The coming of these celestial shrouds has been without observation, but their effect is at once apparent, for the questing sea-birds rise into the upper air, and with doleful wailing cries, fly heavily shoreward.

Without a word, the two men bestir themselves to prepare for the coming night. Hatches and companion are battened down, a look is given to the machinery, and a last touch of careful preparation bestowed upon the all-important apparatus of the light. For, whatever may betide himself or his surroundings, the light-keeper is ever most loyal to, most mindful of, his trust. He never forgets the absolute faith reposed in him by the mariner battling with wind and sea and darkness. Presently the sweet day fails ; gloom gathers swiftly ; night is here. And with it comes, mournfully heralding its advance with bitterly shrill cries, the precursor of the gale. From being the centre of a circle of beauty and peace, the lightship has become

the solitary point of certainty in a wide waste apparently extending to infinity. The shore and the ships have receded beyond the reach of sense, and naught is knowable save the hungry waters rising ever more angrily overside and the increasing force of the wind overhead. The light has been wound up to its place, and sheds a steady radiance around, against the wall of the night ; but, although there is as yet no fog, it seems impossible to believe that the penetrative power of its beams is of sufficient avail against the all-enshrouding cover of this darkness.

That, however, is no concern of the light-keepers. They can only use such means as are provided for them, faithfully, carefully—ready, if need should arise, to give themselves, nor to count the cost of self-sacrifice.

“ Jem, lad,” says the elder, “ it’s your watch below. Get down and sleep, for you’ll need it ; and in any case no good can be done by both of us being worn out together. T’other chaps can’t get back—hear the noise of the breakers over the Dragon ? ” The young eyes of Jem look keenly wistful at his shipmate, for he has noted for long past how the willing mind and heart have been taxed to the utmost, and how the importance of his charge has weighed more and more heavily upon him with advancing years. But he has for so long been accustomed to accept

implicitly the dictates of his mate that any remonstrance does not occur to him, and with a curt "Good-night!" he descends to his narrow bunk, which is within easy hail of the man on deck.

Left alone, the elder man finds himself in a strangely interesting mood. He feels painfully his importance to his fellows instead of exultantly. There is a strong resentment rising in his heart against the increasing gale, instead of a passive acceptance of whatever weather may come as purely incidental to his calling and in no wise personal to him. Dimly, impersonally, the knowledge of his chief possessions flits over the phantasmagoria of his mind, but does not give him any trouble; they are safe and cosy over there. Then there is a curious sensation in his breast of sudden fear, fear of something indefinable. Succeeding to that a swimming in the head and afterwards. . . .

At ten minutes past twelve Jem wakes, keenly conscious of all his surroundings on the instant. His first thought is that he has been called and dozed off, and that brings him up with a jerk. The clock confronting him under the dim lamp confirms his idea, and with muttered condemnation of his laxity he springs to his feet and swiftly gets into his clothes, in spite of the motion of the vessel, now as lively as that of a swing

boat. In three minutes he is climbing up on deck, in full panoply of oilskins and sea boots, and on emerging meets the snarling, biting blast of the bitter gale, the thrash of the sleet, and the hissing stroke of the briny spray. "Joe," he cries; "where are ye? I dropped off again." But there is no reply. Overhead the steady beams of the light reach out into the mist, faithful as ever, but the man whose care had kept it so steadfast is not to be seen. A few hurried steps, a stumble, and Jem has found what *was* his mate, who has been finally relieved.

A few minutes of numbed faculties succeed, for the discovery has been like a blow on the head with a bludgeon, then automatically his activities reassert themselves, and, having attended to his routine duties, he tenderly removes Joe's clay below. Having with truest reverence arranged the body, he returns to the deck and resumes his watch, the increasing power of the gale and blackness of the night having absolutely no effect upon him. How the hours go by he does not know. Nature mercifully attends to these things for us in most instances, lest the overburdened spirit flee, or the awful change in mental and physical relations which we know as madness takes place. No one could have imagined, seeing Jem's methodical performance of his duties, what a crisis he had passed through,

and he himself was perhaps less acutely conscious of it than an outsider would have been.

The sad grey dawn stole in, only making visible the tormented and closely circumscribed area of groaning sea. According to regulations, Jem fired the signal gun ; but, as he well knew, it would be without effect. There was no life-boat near enough to hear it, and, moreover, the gale being right off the land, it probably passed completely unnoticed. So Jem remained alone. He ate and drank mechanically, but felt an unreasoning dread of being down there with *It* any longer than he could help. Feeling deeply the probability of a whole night's watch before him, he tried to sleep, but in vain. A dreadful longing for other companionship than that of the still figure below tortured him, revealing possibilities of suffering to himself unsuspected before. But the day passed, and the night, with its pressing duties, came. Ever fiercer raged the wind, ever higher mounted the sea, until Jem mistily connected the battle of the elements with the passing of his chum. And this mysteriously consoled him, exhilarated him. He faced the savage blast proudly, he did his work calmly, he even went down and took quietly and firmly the dead right hand, as if making a compact.

But it was well that at the first lull of the tempest on the evening of the second day his shipmates

returned. For they found him sitting by the side of the dead, looking fixedly into the wide eyes that saw not, and babbling of precious fellowship. They bore him and his silent companion away, and in the peaceful seclusion of his little village cottage Jem slowly recovered from the long and painful effects of his lonely vigil.

XI

The Stranger

BROWN, bare, and deserted lay the thirty acre field of Farmer Grey. After long waiting for a favourable opportunity, while the steady downward thrust of the inexorable rain laid low the graceful spears of corn in sodden areas, a few bright days of intermittent sunshine had intervened and the busy harvesters had gathered in the sorely injured crop. It now stood in a lonely row of ricks at one corner of the field, well protected by expertly laid thatch from the renewed torrents which streamed from the grey, gloomy skies. Between the regular rows of withered stalks the drenched furrows were showing a sturdy growth of unneeded new vegetation, which would presently clog the delving ploughshares, as they would be heavily drawn through the muddy loam, and make the sturdy ploughmen look wearily to the end of the day's toil ere it was half accomplished. It was about the time of sunrise, and on the upper side of that dank overlay of blended cloud hopeful ones remembered

that the great luminary was flooding the universe with golden light as usual, but all over the land the pale, cheerless day only timidly made visible the face of nature.

Silently as shadows, but with a languid flight most unlike their usual brisk fussiness, a little company of rooks appeared out of the surrounding mist. They were visitors from a somewhat distant colony, drawn by some subtle instinct of their own to this stubble for their much needed morning meal. Posting their usual sentinels, they went steadily to work without even a monitory caw from the grave elders to modify or direct the fidgety unsteadiness of the younger birds, for indeed the provision of fat slugs, juicy snails, and other kinds of enemies of the farmer was most plentiful, while to season the meal there was much sprouting corn shed from the recently gathered sheaves. So they proceeded busily with their occupation, until a long drawn melancholy caw from one of the sentinels warned the party of the presence of an intruder. Low querulous notes in response were sounded, and a few jerky leaps upward were made by nervous members of the party, until with a long easy swing there came into their midst a stranger from the far-away sea. He alighted in the midst of the indignant rooks with a shrill wail of weariness, and immediately began to preen the pearly-grey feathers of his

wings and back, as if conscious of the need of looking his best before these sombre citizens into whose domain he had intruded so abruptly. Whether he knew how elegant, how fairy-like he appeared as compared with their dingy livery is a moot point, but probably he did, for birds of all creatures are extremely self-conscious and well-aware of all their best points. But one thing he certainly knew instinctively, and that was that he was not in the presence of friends, and he cautiously compared the strong curves of his hooked beak with the lance-like mandibles of the rooks. However, he was alone, the odds were very great, and while in company with his fellow gulls hovering over the foaming sea preying upon a school of fish, he would have scorned even the appearance of timidity, here it was a matter of ordinary prudence to be quite modest in his demeanour.

Nevertheless his bright keen eyes kept keenest watch upon the gathering company of rooks. He noted every side-long flutter which brought them nearer to him, heard discriminately every change of note in their hoarse voices. And suddenly, as, seeing a fat slug at his feet he stooped and gulped it in, the whole array at a given signal closed in upon him, the old general in front, and he stood erect facing them. In a voice like the grating of a file upon a saw the rook said

" How dare you intrude upon our feeding grounds ? Where have you come from, oh, ungainly stranger, and why have you left your proper place. Answer quickly ; we have little time to waste upon you, miserable, pale interloper that you are."

" Friends," he replied, " driven by storm from the sea, and separated from my fellows, I flew blindly through the night, having lost my sense of direction, and only knowing that I was escaping from the angry tumult that rages over the waves. And I reached this quiet spot at dawn, weary and hungry ; feeling, indeed, as a stranger in a strange land until I saw your noble forms busily gathering your harvest beneath me. There was such a peaceful and dignified air of rightful ownership of these pleasant fields, and withal your harvest seemed so generously abundant, that I felt impelled to stay my flight among you and implore your hospitality for a brief space. Just a few morsels from your overflowing store, and a rest from my long journey, then I will return to my fellows and sing the praises of the noble ebon landowners, who so well know how to receive strangers." " Haw, haw, haw ! " cried the whole company, with intense sarcasm, while the general said raspingly, " Pale fledgling with a forked tongue, know that we are famous for discernment and accurate estimates of those who come with specious speeches to beguile us of our right, rob

us of our property. More, we fully understand your mission. You are but the spy and scout of an assemblage of your marauding fellows, who await your return and report, to come in force and drive us away. So you lost your way ! ” “ Haw, haw, haw ! ” chorused the exultant flock. “ Oh, yes, we will entertain you so well that you will neither wish nor be able to leave us again. Young stranger, you have come to stay.”

Just then a long mournfully howling blast of wind came over the stubble, and the air became thick with snow. The threatening attitude of the rooks changed to one of doubt and anxiety, and the gull, full of inherited knowledge of how to make the most of every fleeting moment, began to feed, gobbling up hastily the numerous worms and slugs and snails that crawled around him. This apparent indifference filled to overflowing the cup of anger possessed by the old rook, who, with a hoarse caw of rage flapped heavily toward the stranger. The latter lightly rose and circled around the astonished rooks, who, forgetting for a moment the threatening weather, mounted too, and endeavoured to surround the daring bird. But he had realized the immense superiority which he held over them in the present stress of wind, and with the greatest ease he maintained his position above the angry rooks, who strove with

all their powers to reach him, and kept up an incessant tumult of furious cries, as if they could intimidate him by noise.

Meanwhile the wind and rain rapidly increased, much to the discomfiture of the rooks. They faltered in their purpose of attacking the stranger, huddled together with querulous cries taking the place of their previous strident noises, and at last, fairly scared, flew off towards their rookery, closely followed by the triumphant stranger, who, quite forgetting his hunger and weariness, literally bullied and harassed his late persecutors over three fields to their nests. But the trees in which those nests were built were thrashing about in the storm most dangerously, threatening continually to be snapped off at their bases, as many of their upper branches already were. In the midst of that wild scene the whole covey of rooks were whirled away like ragged clumps of withered leaves into the still gathering gloom, followed by a final prolonged scream of triumph from the elated gull. His practical mind, however, forbade him wasting any more of his fast failing energies upon mere enjoyment of victory. He settled down under the nearest hedgerow and, screened from the violence of the storm, began to satisfy his great hunger. He was fortunate in finding abundant food, and having eaten his fill, he stepped into the snuggest corner of the hedge that he could find,

and, after a perfunctory preening of his feathers, slept soundly.

When he awoke the snow had fallen thickly, and covered everything with a deep mantle of white, obliterating every feature of the landscape from recognition. A sense of utter loneliness seized upon him, and he gave utterance to a moaning cry full of sorrow. To his utter surprise and joy it was immediately answered by a whole chorus of screams from near at hand, which he recognized as the voices of a flock of his own kind. He screamed shrilly in answer, and rising excitedly into the still sleet-laden air, balanced himself against the stress of the gale while he peered eagerly around. Suddenly he descried his fellows gathered disconsolately under a hedge in the adjoining field, and immediately darted into their midst. From them he heard a tale of utter destruction upon the sea. Everything about the waves, they said, had been swept away, the tall ships especially, and on their long estranging flight inland they had passed hundreds of seabirds being whirled forward blindly, not knowing whither they went. And they told him of their sufferings from hunger, for your gull is a most voracious devourer of food. In this the first-comer, by virtue of his older acquaintance with the neighbourhood, was, in spite of his youth, able to take that much coveted position to which

we all aspire—that of the looked-up to, the guide, leader, and adviser of others. And his task was comparatively easy, for now the veil of grey above was thinning fast, the sleet had ceased, and the sun's warmth was beginning to penetrate the desolate surroundings cheerfully. In a very few minutes the whole group were immensely busy gleaning rich aftermath of insect and molluscan life, especially the latter, the snails being most grateful to their craving stomachs, and reminding them of the gelatinous delight of the harvest of the sea.

Steadfastly the weather bettered, the sun peeped out, the snow melted, and presently the rooks came back, increased to nearly double their previous numbers. But when they saw that the lonely stranger, upon whose annihilation they were bent, had also received reinforcements, they hovered angrily in the air, filling it with their discordant cries, and yet not daring to bring matters to a crisis by any precipitate action. Meanwhile the gulls had been quietly preening their feathers and listening to the story of inhospitality related by their forerunner. All at once, at a signal from the senior gull, they all rose into the air and hurled themselves at the black army. There was a chaotic intermingling of black and white for a few moments, then with triumphant screams the sea-birds saw their enemies routed.

They fled blindly, dropping every little while some of their number sorely maimed by the sharp hooked jaws of the gulls, and at last, scattered over three counties, the miserable remnant were left to repent as best they might their reception of the stranger, while he and his beautiful companions floated leisurely through the warm sunshine back to the sea.



XII

The River

FED by scores of little rills trickling down the sides of a vast boulder-bestrewn eminence, shy little threads of glistening water that appeared ready to vanish at the first touch of sun, our river began. We babies used to dam it with clay and grass and sticks, laughing gleefully as it overflowed our hastily-constructed barriers, and spread muddily all about us till we could splash and paddle and bedaub ourselves like the semi-savage urchins that we were. It was our chief joy, our choice playground, our most treasured plaything. For somehow we recognized the baby river as an intimate, dimly; though we always pretended to be angry at our failure, we admired the sturdy little stream's calm defiance of our efforts to stop its flow, and more than all we loved the water, the cool shade of its surroundings in the little dell at the foot of the mountain, overhung with creepers depending from the boles of mighty trees, which shut out the terrible heat of the sun. Here we were always permitted to come as to a

place where no harm could befall us, and where we were certainly guarded from sunstroke. True, we got very wet and muddy, but, as mother used to say, it was clean, wholesome dirt ; and as for the wet, our scanty garments always dried on the short passage from the dell to our hut, for it was little more, so fierce were the rays of the Queensland sun.

But gradually as we grew older we came to understand that our little friend, that we could divert from its bed by planting two pairs of chubby feet in it, flowed on and on, gathering strength as it went, until somewhere out in that wide unknown it became a great flood, carrying lordly ships upon its bosom, and blessing with its waters hundreds of homes like ours, which drank at its source. The knowledge came with something of a shock we felt a severance of the old familiar ties, as if we no longer dare treat the steadily flowing rill with childish carelessness, lest we should do harm to some one whom we had never seen, might never know. The years rolled on peacefully as flowed the rills ; we ate and romped, and grew, knowing none of the hardships of life, and all the happier because of the scanty number and simplicity of our pleasures. Mother and father grew grey and gaunt with the struggle to keep us and themselves alive ; they had sorrows of which we knew nothing, but as long as we were

happy they were satisfied that all was well. Changes that even we children could note came all about us ; in everything it seemed but our constant solace and resource—the river. Even the sky and the mountain and the home seemed altered, but the river ran the same and so continued to us a source of unbounded delight.

And then there came a great break in the even flow of our lives. By what untold exertions we never knew, father had scraped together enough capital to take a large farm “down the river,” and we became full of activity in view of the momentous flitting. But not until the wagons were actually loaded and all was in readiness to start did I realize that we were leaving our dear little playmate for ever. Somehow I could not bear the thought of leaving it to trickle on in utter loneliness ; it seemed to me as if the solitude unpeopled by us must be unbearable to it, and I wept bitterly at the thought. You see I was only a girl of twelve, and Tom, my brother, had grown away from being a sharer in all my fanciful imaginings as he was when we were younger. Mother found me, and wonderingly asked why I was crying now—she had shed all her tears before. And when I told her, blushing hotly for fear of being laughed at, she said, soothingly : “Never mind, dearie ; you’ll still have your river, only grown bigger, as you have.” Her gentle

words consoled me, and I dried my tears, although the feeling would still linger that the river I was going to live by could not be the same as this, which I had always looked upon as our own. I bade it a long, affectionate farewell, and the new departure of my life having begun, I never saw it again.

Very welcome, because possessing those prime qualifications for children, newness and strangeness, was the first view of our second home. There, on a promontory, formed by a sharp bend of the river (here half a mile wide), our predecessor had built what to me was a lordly mansion. How poor and mean it would appear now ! It had four large rooms on one floor, was stoutly constructed of weatherboard, roofed with stringy bark slats, and surrounded by banana trees. From the front and both sides glimpses of the rolling river were visible through the thick, tall fronds of the bananas, and at the back, far beyond the waving feathers of the sugar cane and the thick forest of the bush, there arose in blue haze the shadowy outlines of a range of mountains. My dear father had taken over the place as a going concern, with crops and live stock, at a valuation, so that for some time the home interests absorbed us all, there was so much to see and to do. But when once we had settled down I stole away to the river's bank, and, sitting with my feet overhanging

the water on the trunk of an old iron-wood, I courted the acquaintance of the majestic stream. Beautiful it was beyond my power to describe, with steep-to banks and cosy little creeks joining it here and there from dim bush fastnesses, silvery stretches of sand peeping up from its bosom unexpectedly, and affording a safe preening place for stately rows of pelicans, and withal a limpid clearness that made, even where it was deep, every pebble and bunch of scudge visible at the bottom as if reflected in a mirror. There were fish, too, many thousands of them, leaping in the golden sunlight or flashing in the shadows like gleams of molten silver. There were enough of them to feed all the hungry multitudes of black swans that used to fly over our house so thickly as to darken the sky at noonday, and for the myriads of ducks that followed them, keeping very sedately to their own quarter of the river at feeding time. And I often watched the quaint pelican birds just shovelling in the shining fry as if the water was solid with them.

Yes, the river was beautiful ; I never could decide whether it was more so by day or by night, in a storm or a calm, when the first wonderful tints of dawn made it glow with all tender shades of colour, or when on a moonless night the burning stars reflected themselves in its inscrutable black depths, and, the banks having vanished, gave it the

likeness of a shoreless silent sea. But, alas ! it was no longer *my* river. I could admire it, did do so with all my heart ; no keener appreciation of it than mine was possible in all its phases, even when the grey storm-clouds veiled its beauties, and its wavelets snarled under the pressure of the compelling wind. But my heart ached for the gentle companionship of my rivulet up-country. My admiring wonder had now in it no familiarity, no love. Nor, try as I would, could I induce any such sentiment for the noble stream at my feet to stay with me.

It bore to our very threshold ships from the great outer world. New faces, new things, and, best of all, a sense of association with that big community, the existence of which had been like a dream to us in our haunt up-country. Illustrated papers and books and pretty clothes were left by the weekly steamer, which took in exchange eggs and chickens and bananas and pineapples to Sydney for us. And once I went (I was nearly crazy with delight) right down to the bar in one of the steamers on an excursion planned to meet the incoming boat and bring us back. I fear I was very selfish, but I could not help it ; I spoke no word all the trip. I just worshipped the river, but with growing awe. It grew more and more beautiful every mile of its course, and the pretty sailing craft bound up over its shining surface

helped still more to adorn it as pictures and china do a beautiful room. Then we reached its mouth ; I saw the monstrous waves rolling their snowy masses in upon the bar in the most striking contrast to the glassy, fresh spaces inside—I saw the great SEA. And my spirit trembled, my head swam, I felt faint and overborne—it was too much for me.

We met the incoming ship and were transferred, and I was persuaded to look once again at the bar, at the line where the river met the sea, as I had not done since my first sight of that marvel of all the world. I saw the long line of billows rolling in as if bent upon penetrating the river's outward flow, watched the steamer like a toy being danced upon their summits, now high in air, then hidden in foaming hollows, and I felt more and more reverent towards both river and sea. Nevertheless, I was glad to go back. I was full of fear, like a fledgling just away from the nest, and longed to return to its shelter. But on the way back, which was at night, how I admired the skill of the quiet man who, on his little platform above our heads, found his way apparently by instinct through the utter dark, when we could not distinguish land from water. And then there was pointed out to me a glow in the sky, a wonderful light such as I had never before seen. It deepened and brightened as we gazed, until

presently, coming round a bend of the river, we plunged in between two terrible furnaces, the blazing forests on either bank. Here the river was not more than four hundred yards wide, and it seemed as if the mighty tongues of flames met overhead, while beneath us the river ran like blood. The wild things about us wailed in their agony of fear and pain of heat, the fierce fire roared upon its destroying way, but we passed through unscathed. And three hours later I landed at our little wharf safe.

When I awoke in the morning my first thought was of the river, grander and more terrible than I had ever dreamed it to be. And as I looked out of my window towards it, through the thrashing banana trees, I saw that there was a great storm of wind and rain raging such as I had never known before. I hurriedly dressed and went into the kitchen, where my father and brother and mother were talking, with grave faces, of the effect that this tremendous rain would have upon our crops, now almost ready for garnering. We had maize and wheat and sugar-cane covering the whole of our land, and father's face had been bright of late as he had looked over those splendid areas of green and gold. Darker and darker gloomed the heavens, and heavier poured the rain every hour until no sound was discernible save that of the falling water from above. All

through that day and night we sat, snatching brief spells of sleep, and full of fear, of what I hardly knew, save that such terrific rain filled me with nameless apprehension. Then at mid-day the rain ceased, the sky cleared, and out shone the sun. But the river, justifying all my dread of its size and power, continued to rise, being now an awful rushing flood, laden with wreckage from the land. Foot by foot it gained, ruthlessly mounting towards us, until we must needs fly to one tiny point before the house with a few necessaries, whence we looked out upon a wide desolation of waters with eyes that saw no hope. All we had possessed was gone except our lives, and for those we did not feel grateful. Moreover, it was not yet apparent whether we would even be permitted to retain them. But suddenly the steamer came in sight, and, seeing us, sent a boat and took us away. We went, giving not a look behind. We left that hopeless scene, and were borne, in company with hundreds of other unfortunates, to a better place, whence I have never returned to look upon either the source of the strength or the terrors of my river.

XIII

Birds on Passage

THE chapter before last I had the pleasure of chronicling the visit of a weather-worn sea-bird to one of our inland fields, and the reception he unfortunately met at the beaks of those grim ruffians the rooks, and it was my intention to have reversed the story this week in order to tell of some visits paid by inshore birds to vessels at sea in which I have been sailing. But by one of those coincidences which have become so common in my experience that I now hardly take any notice of them, on taking up my Newspaper on Tuesday I read with great pleasure an article by the Deputy-Superintendent of the Indian Museum, Mr. Finn, on the same topic. Very fine reading it was, too ; but for the moment I was minded to forego my intention, as I felt that it would look as if I was borrowing ideas. A little consideration, however, showed me that such abstention on my part was not necessary, since I must of necessity deal with the matter on the lines of personal experience, and, moreover,

those experiences have been in different parts of the ocean to Mr. Finn's. So I hope if he sees this screed he will understand that I am not poaching.

My first meeting with land birds at sea was on board of the *Investigator*, a barque in which I was homeward bound from the Gulf Coast of Mexico thirty-four years ago. We were at least 200 miles from land, and careering gaily along under all plain sail, when one of the men, going to his bunk for his pipe, found a dear little bird, very like a blue tit, sitting on the edge of the shelf eagerly devouring cockroaches. She was an old sugar ship, and, like nearly all of them, fairly swarmed with those nasty insect pests. I don't mind rats on board ship—they aren't bad company; but I draw a severe line at cockroaches, tarantulas, scorpions, centipedes, and bugs—especially bugs. Being a sensible, as well as a sentimental, man, August did not attempt to cage the confiding little stranger, who repaid his hospitality by remaining, and fearlessly using the shelf as his headquarters. All hands paid visits to that bunk in the course of the afternoon, many of them envious of August's luck in having such a guest. But just after dark in the second dog-watch, from 6 to 8 p.m., another man announced excitedly that he had two birds in his bunk—a yellow and a green one. And

before the little stir caused by these fresh arrivals had died away, it was found that other little visitors had arrived, until before midnight the dingy house was quite an aviary. The birds were of differing sizes, though none were as large as a thrush, and of all the colours conceivable. One trait they all had in common—a perfectly fearless tameness. They would even allow themselves to be handled without evincing any signs of dread. And they all loved cockroaches, of which we had an inexhaustible store.

Next day the ship was quite peopled by birds. The intense interest taken in their movements by the men, the anxiety manifested by a man when a bird he recognized, or thought he recognized, as his particular guest, was pretty, almost pathetic, to see. All quarrels were forgotten, and a sort of golden era of Theocritus seemed to have begun. During the ensuing two days all hands lived in an idyllic dream, begrudging themselves sleep in order to watch the pretty evolutions of their busy, graceful little guests. But on the evening of the second day a tragedy took place which aroused a storm of wrath. A stalwart lumpish Finn was watching with tenderest solicitude the roguish play of his especial pet—a wee golden bird, something like a canary. He had gotten a handful of cockroaches, and was doling them out one by one to his friend on the

ship's rail (it was just before sunset), and the bird was fluttering coquettishly above his head, occasionally darting out over the side a fathom or so. Suddenly there came down hissing a veritable bolt from the blue, a brown shadow, which enfolded the little bird, emitting at the same time a shrill scream. And presently there was to be seen, perched on one of the ratlines half-way up the fore-rigging, a hawk, with the poor little yellow bird clutched tightly in his talons, tearing savagely at the palpitating body with his strong hooked beak. Jack uttered a howl of rage and started aloft, but as he was about as agile as a bear, it will be understood that he stood no possible chance of capturing so exceedingly nimble a bird as a hawk. And, besides, there were others. Out of the void, as the first-comers had arrived, the hawks, led by the same mysterious instinct warning the small birds of the presence of food, had followed them, and now all around the ship were to be seen those keen marauders, occasionally descending with a whirl upon some luckless wee fellow, and bearing him triumphantly aloft to devour him.

At dark there was a conference. The little birds roosted contentedly in forecastle, galley, and cabin, and it was seen that high aloft their grim enemies were also awaiting the return of day to resume their cruel, but natural, operations.

So the men, after consultation, decided upon a raid aloft in the hope of doing justice, as they thought it, upon the cannibal intruders. The hunt began, and although there were some narrow escapes from death on the part of the very angry sailors, they all returned to the house safely, having captured four birds at the cost of some severe scratches and tears from those lethal beaks and claws. By the dim light of the forecastle lamp the pirates were examined, and—pardoned. For when they were caught the men remembered that they were only doing as Nature bade them, and were in consequence nowise to blame. But it was wonderful to see the haughty fearlessness manifested by the captives. Their yellow eyes gleamed unconquerably ; their talons and beaks were ready at any moment to tear vengefully at the first hand near, and altogether they extorted admiration. But they were held captive, and offered cockroaches, which they refused disdainfully. And as no one even thought of giving them a little bird to eat, they would doubtless have starved, but that on the wreck of the vessel, a few days later, they were all set free, and I dare say regained their native forests.

A year afterwards, during a terrific gale in the North Atlantic, on board the Nova Scotian barque *Sea Gem*, I went into the forecastle at midnight to get a biscuit from the bread-barge,

which hung from a beam out of the way of the rats, and it was with an unbounded surprise that I found the edge of that square wooden vessel completely equipped by at least two score little birds, which I afterwards knew to be swifts. Poor little wanderers ! They had reached a resting-place only to die. For worn out, I suppose with exertion and privation, they all perished. Indeed, we discovered during the next day over two hundred of them in various parts of the ship, clinging tightly to whatever they had perched upon, but all dead. And the sorrow of that mixed crew of sailors was great. We were then six days' full sail at our best speed — about ten knots an hour — from Cape Clear.

While cruising in the Java Sea, *en route* to Hong Kong, I was ordered aloft one night with others to furl the top-gallant sails, and on the main-top-gallant yard I found a pair of pigeons as large as our big wood-pigeons. I found time to secure them, before furling the sail, by a piece of marline to the tye, and brought them down, apparently none the worse for their rough usage. Fed on good grain and cockroaches, they developed amazingly, and I regret to say were encouraged in their pugnacious proclivities by all of us. We had never heard of Malays' fighting pigeons, but we found out that these two would fight, and

we had many an exciting bout. They were always ready, and never allowed themselves beaten. Such plucky creatures I never saw. Whenever you put a hand near them they always struck it. No thought of consequences ever seemed to occur to them, and whenever I have since heard of or seen gamecocks, I have thought of these pigeons as being quite the equal in courage of any gamecock that ever lived.

When crossing the stormy sea (in the S.W. monsoon) which joins the Chinese mainland to the great Philippine Island group I was one evening at the wheel just at sunset. We were on a wind, and carrying on, too, for the skipper was anxious to get across, so I had all my work at hand to keep her full and bye. Yet, as the occupation was so much more manual than mental, I became presently mightily interested in the appearance of a stork, who was evidently overborne with weariness, and wanted a resting-place. But, do what he would, he could not summon up sufficient enterprise to board us. I don't know that I ever felt so much sympathy for any living thing, except when I sat once with the naked little body of my two-year-old daughter across my knees for four hours, watching her go out of one convulsion into another, powerless to do anything but pray, yet full of fearful admiration of the way in which the sorely overstrained flesh

sought to retain the spirit that "wanted out," as the Scotch say.

Trust himself to windward the bird would not. Instinctively he dreaded an indraught, and the impossibility of his again winning his way to windward in case alighting was not advisable. How could he know, poor creature, of the natural cushion of air in front of each sail, in which he might have safely manœuvred for a quiet settling-place ? So he kept either astern or in the most dangerous place of all, along the lee, where the down-draught from the sails, the back-lash of a moderate gale, made his position most dangerous. He was evidently so weary, his need was so great, night was falling fast and the wind was ever strengthening—indeed, the heart of his lonely audience was quite full at sight of the unequal conflict, which, it seemed, could only have one end. Again and again he sheered in by tremendous efforts, his great wings working convulsively, his long neck strained out straight before him, until he got under the eddy from the mizen, the barque would give a lee-lurch, and away he would be whirled to leeward again. Fain would I say that so gallant a fight for mere life was eventually crowned with success. But this is fact, not fiction, and we know from grim experience that all too often the bravest warriors of all kinds fight on, only to die fighting. My stork came up for the

hundredth time under the foot of the mizen, a heavier squall than usual careened the *Dartmouth* over until the water spouted in through the lee scupper-holes, and, a bundle of ragged feathers, the gallant bird was dashed under the crest of a huge wave and disappeared.

Next evening I caught a goat-sucker. I did not know that it was one until long after. All I noted was the owl-like softness of his feathers and the extraordinary way in which, when it opened its mouth, its head seemed to come in two halves, only held together by a little integument at the back. I kept it alive until we entered Cavite Bay by feeding it on cockroaches, of which it would swallow a handful and then go to sleep. But knowing that I could not hope to keep it much longer, I gave it liberty as we entered the heads, and it went straight for the nearest shore, where I hope it found food as plentiful as it had while under my care. Many other birds have been voluntary passengers with me, that is, on board the ship in which I happened to be sailing at the time, of which I can only mention a splendid acquisition on the Australian coast of twenty-two canaries—all songsters. They did not come from shore, for the wind was blowing direct from the sea. I am sure they came from some ship arriving from China. Anyhow, they were a great blessing to us all the way home.

XIV

At Last

ON the pleasant shore of the beautiful basin of Minas, Evangeline's country, Robert Wilson tilled the fruitful meadows, grew apples and potatoes in splendid superabundance, and raised a few good kine, also an occasional litter of frolicsome pigs. He was aided in this quiet pastoral life by his good, sensible, and helpful wife, and, as the uneventful years rolled by, three sons were added to them, who all followed in the plodding, patient footsteps of their father and mother. Content so to live, unambitious of rising in the world, and loving their home—their very own, every rood of it—in the whole of broad Canada no pleasanter and more placid family circle than that of the Wilsons could have been found. They seemed to reflect, as did the summer waters of the Basin, the towering mass of Mount Blomidon, under which the house nestled, in their lives the peace of their happy surroundings. But, unlike the waters upon whose shores they lived, they had no seasons of

storm and stress, when the terrible winter gales combined with the fierce flow of the swiftest tides in the wide world to make that narrow sea a place of dread, only navigable by seafarers with hearts of truest temper and bodies inured to the most tremendous hardships. Nor did the winter cold, when the Frost King continually essayed to bind the rushing waters in icy chains, and in the futile effort to do so piled floe upon floe to the rending, shattering accompaniment of elemental roarings, until the whole Basin was covered with swiftly rushing masses of thick-ribbed ice, make those peaceful ones regret their being compelled to live in so stern a climate. They just worked on, looking forward to the spring resurrection time, and enjoying to the full the many bright opportunities for brisk outdoor fun afforded them by the brilliant days and nights, when, without a breath of air stirring, the health-laden air was like ethereal wine, and almost as heady.

During the winter, as was common with the Acadian coast farmers, Wilson usually "got out" a schooner, being, indeed, a shipbuilder born, and looking upon that wonderful art and mystery as one that could hardly be acquired, but must be inherited. All the suitable timber that his land yielded, and there was much of it, he reserved for this purpose. Not being compelled to cut it down and sell it, or eager to turn it into money

quickly, he refused all offers for it except and until it was hewn and bolted into the graceful shape of a ship. Shipbuilding was the hobby of his life, although he had never been to sea, nor felt a desire to go, a curious distinction from all his neighbours (the nearest a mile away) shared by his three sons. When he had finished building and sold a vessel he seemed to have lost all interest in her—that she would be a good sea-boat, and give satisfaction to her owners and crew, always was to him a foregone conclusion, amply justified in the event. And so Robert Wilson's twin businesses of farming and shipbuilding went prosperously forward for many years until, when his youngest boy was fifteen, his eldest twenty, and himself forty-two, another boy was born to him, his gentle wife being then forty.

Nothing in all the placid current of their career had so stirred them as this event, for they had not the slightest idea a year before of such a possibility ; their family seemed complete, rounded off, the possible advent of grandsons in their old age being just a hazy idea. They felt as if newly wedded again, began to make fresh plans for the future, and, indeed, were more consciously happy than they had ever been before. The three stalwart sons, too, made a tremendous fuss of the coming of this wee brother, and all their rather sluggish instincts of joy were quickened and

intensified. They conspired with their parents to make Jemmy an idol, they endeavoured to anticipate his every wish, and when he vociferously demanded something they could not possibly get him, their sorrow and disappointment was great. In consequence of this acceleration of their sensations much of the peace they had always enjoyed disappeared ; if their joys were keener, their sorrows appeared where hitherto had been only a placid flow of peaceful life. Jemmy was at the bottom of it all. He was self-willed, autocratic from his early babyhood. Feeling his absolute power over his adoring subjects, he used it without any sense of compunction for giving pain or trouble, but as of innate right. And they loved him all the more for it. As he grew old enough to get about their solicitude increased. For he evidently possessed a daring, energetic, and adventurous spirit, that never stopped to count the cost of any deed he might desire to do, and, as his strong brothers, in their fervent love and admiration for him, aided him in the accomplishment of his desires, his life very soon became a series of hair-breadth escapes from death. Yet he seemed to bear a charmed life, and recovered easily from injuries that ought, according to all rules, have killed him.

By the time Jemmy was twelve it had become obvious to all his family that this peaceful life

was not to be his. The one thing which would always draw him from any pursuit he might be engaged in was the sight of a vessel passing down the Basin outward bound to sea. Hereditary instincts dormant in his father and mother and brothers were at work, fostered unconsciously by the latter, who were, as usual with Nova Scotian coast dwellers, full of stories of the sea. His grandfathers on both sides had been among the most daring seamen of that daring race, and tales of their prowess had power to hold him enthralled when otherwise he would have been out and about all manner of mischief. Still, he did take an interest in the shipbuilding also, and early gained a proficiency in the handling of broad axe, adze, and chisel that made his father's keen grey eyes sparkle with appreciation. When he was fifteen an order came to his father to build a barque of 1,200 tons, at least three times larger than any Robert had ever before attempted. But size being a mere detail, all their resources were brought into play, the keel was laid, and the vessel grew. Jemmy was saturated with delight. Strangely enough, it steadied him. His extravagances were laid aside, his brows began to knit, and in every detail of the new vessel's construction he took a deep, earnest interest. It seemed as if his volatile spirit had found its objective, the lack of affection only too manifest in him—he

received all love as his due, and never appeared to give any in return—was replaced by a deep sense of interest in this calling, and his family all noted the change.

The ship was finished. Her towering masts swung into their places, her equipment was all arranged, and Jemmy, as the son of his father, was permitted to give the launching stroke. Then he turned to his father, and announced his intention of going to sea in her. It was a heavy blow, only slightly anticipated, the more so as the father knew the character of the skipper who was to command her, a ruffian who, though a perfect seaman, should have been a bloodthirsty pirate instead of a peaceful merchantman. But it was too late in the day to thwart the youngster now, after having yielded to him all his life. Every inducement that love could offer, every argument that common sense could produce, was used, and in vain. And Jemmy, full of glowing anticipations of the adventurous life for which his nature craved, sailed in the *James H. Wilson*, bidding a careless and preoccupied farewell to that little home group who had loved him better than their lives.

All his father's anticipations of the life awaiting him were realized. The barque was an abode of terror, the skipper and mates brutes of unmatchable ferocity, and the men poor slaves who

never stayed in the ship a day longer than they could help, but fled in any port where they could escape, leaving clothes, money, everything they possessed behind them but life. And through this inferno of seafaring Jemmy Wilson gradually held his way. Being from the first destined for an officer, there was no brutality used to him, until he, in his turn, strode her quarterdeck as her master. And never once in those ten years had he sent a word to those loving ones who had so tenderly lavished upon him all the treasures of their hearts. He just went his hard way, ambitious only for power, careless of his money, addicted to all the vices of the sailor but drunkenness, and as far as any feeling or thought of home, father, mother, brothers was concerned, they might have been absolutely non-existent.

The effect upon them was cruel. The men grew hard, especially the father; the mother aged terribly fast, her wistful heart ever yearning after her lost boy. Of course, news—vague news—of him came now and then; but those ships seldom return to the coast villages where they are built, and although news of the ship's smartness in making passages, her success as a freight-earner, etc., filtered through the usual channels, the message to the mother never came. Yet she never lost heart. Her husband and sons having grown morose and savagely intolerant

of the mention of his name, she now never uttered it ; but deep down in her tender heart his image as the curly-haired, bright-faced, four-year-old boy was ever present, along with a sense of absolute certainty that she should see him again. And so their weary days rolled on, all the brightness gone out of their lives. They just worked on, none of the sons getting married or apparently caring to, and their means accumulating until they were fairly wealthy, but feeling no satisfaction in the fact.

Then one winter—a season long to be remembered on the coast—there was a succession of terrible gales, snowstorms, and frosts, so severe that it really seemed as if even the race off Blomidon and Cape Sharp would be stopped in the savage grip of the Ice King. The bright, clear nights, so enjoyable in those winters, appeared to have all been stopped by some strange breach of law. And on the worst night of that awful year the Wilson family sat silently around the roaring fire, each busy with his own thoughts, while the tempest tore at the house as if it would carry it bodily over the Peninsula. Suddenly the mother rose, a strange light in her eyes, and screamed, “ My boy’s come home at last ! ” And outside the tempest thundered.

In the morning, when it had lulled, and the blue peeped through the grey lift, while Blomidon’s

crest was hidden as if in steam, they saw lying across the end of the building slip the remains of a ship, and a little higher up upon the frozen shore a man, who was also a block of ice, his rigid arm through a lifebuoy whereon was painted the name *James H. Wilson*.

The son and the ship had come home at last !

XV

A Christmas on Aldabra

WILLIE PARKER was a dear lad of fifteen, who owned that most precious of all treasures, a good home and parents, entirely wise and sympathetic. With his two sisters and a younger brother he had, ever since his earliest recollections, always enjoyed the most intimate fellowship with his father and mother, the fellowship that should exist between parents and children, but so seldom does. Now one of the great features of the Parker home was their joyful observance of family festivals, and especially of the greatest of all, Christmas. To all of them it was a time of greatest joy, and they felt truly sorry for those who in their modern affectation of cynicism derided Christmas keeping as utter folly and hypocrisy.

Now Willie, when asked what he would like to be, promptly decided for the life of a sailor. And his parents, after placing before him all the arguments they could find against such a calling, and finding him still firm in his desire, did not try to

thwart him, but at once set about getting him bound in a good ship with a highly respectable firm, so that he might have the best possible chance in the chosen profession. The same thoroughness and energy that characterized all Mr. Parker's home and business activities was not wanting here, and so it came to pass that within two months of the day that Willie made his choice he was outward bound from Cardiff to Bombay in the splendid sailing-ship *Conqueror*, laden with coal for the Bombay, Baroda, and Central Indian Railway Company.

The *Conqueror* was not only a grand ship, well found and well manned, but the captain and officers had a high sense of their duties towards the young fellows committed to their charge for training in the (sea) way they should go. There were seven apprentices, all berthed together as usual in the so-called half-deck, but not, as usual, left to themselves in their watch below nor when on deck, nor were they kept at the most menial employments in order that the crew might not grumble. They were really taught, made to feel that their sea education was an important matter, their apprenticeship time far too valuable to be frittered away, and in consequence, before the good ship had reached the Equator all the lads had acquired an intelligent idea of what they were expected to do, and why.

In any case, this was well and as it should be, but it was especially so now, for after crossing the line a most evil sequence of events, which for want of a more lucid definition we usually call a run of bad luck, set in for the *Conqueror* and her crew. A strange unknown malady attacked the crew, probably brought on board by one of their number from his last voyage. It puzzled the captain beyond measure, for neither the book of directions in the medicine chest nor his long previous experience gave him any clue as to what should be the treatment. One by one the men sickened and died, yet, curiously enough, for some time the dread destroyer kept to the fore end of the ship. But the weather was terribly embarrassing, the doldrums seemed as if they were determined not to allow the ship to pass through their baffling barrier. Rain and calm and squalls in every direction prevented any progress, and, as no vessels were sighted for weeks, it really seemed as if the ship had drifted into a special cycle of evil weather prepared for her alone.

The captain and officers grew haggard and worn with hard work and anxiety as day succeeded day and progress seemed impossible, while the ravages of disease forward appeared to increase. The only comfort those hardly entreated seafarers found was in the fine conduct of the

boys, who repaid with compound interest the care they had received during the early days of the passage. They treated the whole affair as a splendid adventure, and while grieving over the frequent burials, were not in the least alarmed for themselves. Also, they toiled like seasoned seamen to get the ship along, feeling proud that they were able to do so much thus early in their sea career.

At last the south-east Trades were found, fitful and erratic it is true, but in their general direction favourable enough to allow the ship to lay a good course to the southward. This, however, decided the captain to pursue his voyage, instead of making for Rio, as he was sorely tempted to do. Out of sixteen able seamen he had already lost eight, and four more were almost hopeless. Still, as the Trades held so well to the eastward and freshened steadily, his hopes rose, and he felt that even if all his foremast hands died, as seemed only too probable, he would still be able to get his ship to Bombay, since he would have no great stretch of stormy easting to run down. It would mean a long passage, of course, but that was far preferable to putting into a Brazilian port.

So the *Conqueror* was edged gradually and at an ever-increasing rate southward, but, unhappily, the mortality among the crew did not cease. Also the third officer, a most brilliant

young fellow and a great favourite of the captain's, was seized one afternoon and died the following morning. But, having taken him, the plague seemed to be content as far as the after-guard was concerned, and, indeed, from that day there was a decided improvement in the health of the ship. Only four of the poor fellows forward were left though, and they, in spite of their natural depression, gradually became vigorous again, so that in spite of the sorely shrunken number of his crowd, the captain looked forward hopefully to the passage round the Cape.

It is now time to muster the remains of the crew. Captain and two mates, four A.B.'s, seven apprentices of fifteen to sixteen years of age, and three Chinese—Ah Toy, Wan Lung, and Yee Hop. I have put them last ; but, really, although they were "Chinks," and filled the almost menial offices of cook and stewards, they were a host in themselves. Captain Broadbent had carried them for several years, and was wont to say that he believed that, although Chinese, there were no better men in the world. Certainly, on this memorable voyage they abundantly justified his encomiums, for while they always attended perfectly to their own special duties, they were to be found helping wherever help was needed by night or by day. And Willie, who had never seen a Chinese before, had learned to love them.

I know that it is said that the Chinese are incapable of affection ; I know, too, that it is a lie. As Willie found, for having shown these three queerly-named, slant-eyed pagans that he loved them, they lost no opportunity of showing him that they loved him in return.

But this is premature. Gradually the *Conqueror* slipped from the South-East Trades into the Westerlies, and that too so easily that the captain began to tell himself that, after all, he wouldn't make such a bad passage, and that the ill-wind of the early part of the passage might blow him and his officers much good. This feeling deepened as he saw how tenderly the Westerlies dealt with him. True, he dared not "carry on" ; but then the wind was never too strong for a fairly good show of canvas, and—take it all round—matters might have been very much worse. So the good ship glided along round the Stormy Cape, which was on its best behaviour, until she reached the meridian of 50° E., when the wind still holding strong and steady to the westward she was hauled up eight points, and began to lessen her latitude every day. Gradually the weather became finer, with wind lighter, and tending to variableness, making the captain feel glad that he had decided against trying the Mozambique Channel with his weakly-manned ship.

And so they drew northward to sight of Madagascar, passed Reunion and Mauritius, until, being well within the Trade area again, Captain Broadbent began to wonder what had become of the south-east wind. Soon his wonder deepened, into anxiety as the light airs and showers began to give place to ugly weather, stifling sulphury calms, and crashing cloudbursts shot through with lurid fires. To add to his cares, he became aware that the sulphur-laden atmosphere was not entirely due to the air being surcharged with electricity ; the badly-ventilated cargo of coal was obeying natural laws, and was very probably on fire. That, however, was a catastrophe he would not contemplate, nor would it have helped for him to do so, since additional ventilation was impossible now under the current weather conditions, and if combustion had really begun it would only have precipitated disaster.

Then came the crowning calamity, heralded as it had been by the celestial signs. A belated hurricane burst upon the devoted ship and her almost impotent crew. It dealt with her as it would, for even had she been fully manned, little more could have been done but make everything as secure as possible. And with that perversity of trouble which so often characterizes sea calamities in the height of the tempest, when the experi-

enced ones were whispering hopefully to themselves that she was weathering it, the fore and main hatch burst upwards in a volcano of soaring flame. Then the hopes of all nearly died. This was on December 22.

Willie had been crouching in the midst of his fellow-apprentices, just inside the half-deck door, when the dread truth suddenly burst upon them all, and—how or why he will never know—they dispersed, and the darkness swallowed them up. Presently he found himself in the grip of two strong arms, dully conscious of that grip amidst the surrounding uproar of wind and wave and fire. And after that he remembered no more. Poor lad, he had been subjected to a strain of body and mind such as the strongest man might well be forgiven for succumbing to, and had he then died, his passage hence would have been unattended by any of those pains the frail flesh so much protests against and dreads.

When he returned to the world of sense his eyes opened upon a sky of limpid blue, with just a tiny fluff of snowy cloud flecking its pure expanse. And then between it and his vacant gaze was obtruded a stolid yellow face, devoid of all expression save perhaps that the oblique eyes had in them a strange, soft light. Willie strove to rise, but a skinny, sinewy arm restrained him, and a well-remembered voice said : “Willie pigeon

blong stop plenty quiet. Maskey now. Velly good keep still." "But where am I, Wan Lung ; where's the ship an' Bill an' Tom an' the old man ; where's everybody ?" "My no shabee, no have got there. My think it make lun' 'way noth' boat. Ship plenty burn, fire too muchee hot, tyfoong makee blake evellyting. No can do any more. All litee. Look see, blong land lite here ; makee chop chop go shore. You no shabee Ah Toy, Yee Hop plenty low makee come shore fore darlk."

Willie sank back in the bottom of the gig and wondered why she had survived, why only he and the three Chinese had been spared, and many other things. And then his wandering thoughts focussed themselves upon the fact that it was Christmas time, and his wondering dwelt upon that happy home circle preparing for their best-loved festival without him, a gap there for the first time since the Parker family became a fact. A tear or two stole down his cheeks, but he was too worn-out to feel sorrow very acutely, and sleep, the sleep of exhaustion, again enfolded him mercifully. When he awoke, he was being carried ashore with utmost gentleness. A shelter from the ardent sun-rays had been prepared for him, and three men who apparently knew nothing of such human failings as fatigue or helplessness were busy preparing what by the smell of it was

a most sumptuous meal. He lay luxuriously watching them, feeling at times a strange choking sensation as he noted their wonderful care of him, but withal enjoying himself amazingly. Presently there came back to him the old feeling of Christmas, and by dint of earnest questioning he ascertained from Wan Lung what had happened since he had last been fully conscious of the date, and found that this was indeed Christmas Day. Naturally his first impulse was to bemoan himself, for he was only a boy, although a rare good one, but, remembering his mercies, he restrained himself and insisted upon being thankful.

What a meal that was ! There was roast tortoise and boiled eggs and dressed crab and a curious pie of crushed biscuit mixed with the contents of a tin of roast turkey which one of his yellow friends had snatched and brought with him. They ate the strange food, ate to repletion, and when at last it was all gone, and the impassive Chinese had loaded their pipes, and sat stolidly smoking, Willie cried out, " Ah, I feel I must wish you a happy Christmas, you good men." Yee Hop murmured interrogatively, " What pigeon blong him happy Klissumass ? " And then, had any one been there to see, a strange scene was enacted. A typical English boy, with all the shyness and poverty of expression which characterizes that curious piece of humanity,

struggling with all his limitations in the earnest attempt to tell the wonderful story of the first Christmas Day. It cannot be reproduced, the quaint jargon, and still quainter interruptions, as the queer auditory in their eagerness to miss no essential point sought explanation after explanation. It was wound up by a long-drawn sigh from Ah Toy, and the lucid remark, "My thinkee blong all litee. Joss man blong top side, makee come down here allee samee poor fellow me. Blong littee baby no can catchee house. Plenty Joss bird sing top side only poor man makee look see. Me shabee plenty, my likee allee samee."

Much more to the same effect followed from Wan Lung and Yee Hop, and Willie felt a succession of thrills of satisfaction mingling with his deep sorrow for those whom he deemed entirely lost. But after a short detention upon the island, a calling French gunboat rescued the little party, and took them to Tamatave, where he learned to his immense joy and relief that the whole of his ship-mates had been picked up in the lifeboat and taken to Mauritius, where in a fortnight he and his yellow friends rejoined them.

XVI

Christmas at Sea

WHETHER it was because even before I went to sea, and that was early enough in my life, dear knows, I had formed a high ideal of what Christmas Day should be and how kept, I do not know, but certainly I have always reckoned my sea-time by the number of Christmases spent and the general character of the ships by the kind of treatment seamen then received on board. I cannot here attempt in the space at my disposal to deal with all those sea Christmases of mine, but as far as I may I will in most prosaic fashion record my experiences, and how far they kept pace with my desires. My ideal Christmas remains precisely the same as it was in my earliest recollection of the season, a time for the reunion of scattered families, of plenty of good food for everybody, an air of grateful rejoicing, of consciousness that the Prince of Peace and goodwill had indeed come to this world. Let me admit that at a very early age I found that I could not realize these ideals, although I always lived in

hope to do so. And when I went to sea I found that my ideal Christmas was quite out of the question, for reasons which need not be enlarged upon. Yet I thankfully record that I have known large-hearted skippers who have done their best to make their men feel how universal the brotherhood of man should be on that great day. And this in spite of the fact that some of them were men with whom the idea of specialising, as it were, any day in the year, except the first day of each week, savoured of heathenism.

My first Christmas on board ship was an extraordinary one, and although it is now thirty-five years ago, every detail of it is graven indelibly upon my memory. I was then "boy," not any special kind of boy, but just everybody's boy, in a good-sized barque, the *Sea Gem*, of St. Andrew's, Nova Scotia. We were loading cotton in Mobile Bay, Alabama, for Liverpool, and bitterly cold I remember it was for those genial latitudes. The huge bales of cotton used to come down the Dog River in steamers to the fleet of ships in the Bay, and be jerked on board in double-quick time by the uproarious darkies, then only just emerging from the slave condition. Up till the 23rd of December they came in rapid succession, and then their visits suddenly ceased. As all fresh provisions were brought by them, and consumed by the ships almost day by day, our

outlook for a supply of Christmas cheer was particularly gloomy, and the murmuring was great. But we had for a skipper a particularly able Welshman, with a keen eye to the main chance, who happened to have gone up to Mobile City on business with the last of the steamers, and found himself apparently unable to return in the ordinary way. Instead of consoling himself with the Christmas delights to be obtained "up town," he turned the opportunity to good account, getting very rightly a reputation for philanthropy and good sense at the same time. He chartered a schooner and loaded her with everything in the way of Christmas provisions he could lay hold of at such short notice—pigs, poultry, beef, vegetables, fruit, soft tack, etc.—and, sailing on the morning of the 24th, succeeded in reaching us very late on Christmas Eve, when we were all looking forward to sea-fare in harbour on Christmas Day.

I have never seen such a sight on a ship's decks in my life as was to be witnessed on board the *Sea Gem* that night. She was like a country market-place crowded into one-tenth of its usual space. Every lantern we could scare up swung about her, lighting up the grunting, cackling, gobbling victims and the heaps of other produce, while over all the vigorous skipper sat in state, disposing of his precious wares to the multitude of eager applicants from every ship in the har-

bour, whose boats surrounded us like a swarm of bees. Our men worked hard but willingly all night, and by morning all had been supplied with the materials for a good Christmas dinner, and there was abundance left for us. What wonder that all the crews of those vessels rose up and called Captain Jones blessed ! As far as feasting went, that was a most noble Christmas for all concerned, entirely owing to the energy and fore-thought of one man.

My next Christmas was really the first spent at sea. We were outward bound to India in a big Scotch ship, whose owners bore a most unenviable reputation as regarded the supply of food to their men. But we had a jovial, genial skipper and first-class officers, and by chance were almost becalmed in perfectly lovely tropical weather. A whole holiday was given, of course, like Sunday, and much pleasant intercourse was indulged in fore and aft ; but, oh ! if the fare had been served out to the inmates of any of our workhouses there would have been a to-do ! All the ordinary provisions were vile, and had as well that absolute lack of variety which almost always characterized the food-scales of sailing-ships in those days. The only fresh provisions for the crew were sundry six-pound tins of, not "bully beef," but soup and bouilli, which was aptly characterized by a facetious negro member of our crew as being

essentially French in its make-up—"Soupa de bulliong, two bucket a vater, one onionong." It was not quite so bad as that, but not much better. A great effort was made by the careful steward, and about a pound of raisins handed to the cook, who incorporated them with the seven pounds of flour served out as the legitimate ration of the crew. With yeast, fat, and water, the cook perpetrated a "railway duff"—a plum at every station, as we say—and there was much hilarity at the counting of the number of raisins in each man's "whack" of duff when served out. This, with a tin of soup for each watch, formed the feast, eked out by the allowance of fetid, tar-saturated beef allotted to us as usual. Yet, because she was an easy-going ship and a good feeling existed between forward and aft, there was far less growling than I have heard in many better-found ships, and when, after dinner, the steward sung out, "Grog, oh!" and the unusual tot was handed out from the skipper's private store of rum, there was a general consensus of opinion that she was not half a bad ship, after all.

I pass over a Christmas spent in London of course and come to the lamentable tale of how the best intentions of owners, skipper, and cook were frustrated by the unstable sea. Such a feast I have never seen provided in a sailing ship be-

fore or since, and the duff was a wonder. However the cook managed his day's work I cannot think, as he had over one hundred first, second, and third-class passengers to provide for as well as the crew, and the ship's behaviour was simply scandalous.

She was skipping about like a crazy monkey in the ugly sea which gets up in the Bay of Biscay during a south-west gale, and he could only do his work at all by chocking himself off in most ingenious ways in his galley. And I do not know who suffered most, he or I, when, having delivered one of those champion duffs to me at the galley door, he saw it and its bearer swept away aft along the lee-scuppers in the heart of a foaming sea, which had just lopped on board over her bows. When I emerged from the smother I still grasped the empty kid, but the duff, in brown fragments, was gradually finding its way through the scupper holes. The forecastle was flooded out, and what food was obtained was eaten under circumstances of painful difficulty amid sodden surroundings. Yet when the weather cleared up and we got the rags on her again in the afternoon, cheerfulness reigned, we had almost too much grog served out, and an impromptu concert held on the main deck in the evening was a grand success. So taken all round, it was perhaps as good as sea Christmases usually are. But the

cook never forgot or forgave the ship for spoiling his grand duff.

A strange Christmas, too, was that I spent in one of the intercolonial coasting steamers, compelled by the exigencies of the mail service to leave Sydney for Auckland on Christmas Eve. It was my only experience of the kind, and I am truly grateful it was never repeated. All the coarser elements of Christmas keeping were in evidence, as if crew and passengers were fully determined that the company, or whoever was responsible for sending the ship to sea on Christmas Eve, should reap no benefit. Feasting and drinking began early, and continued until, as far as I knew or could see, the only sober persons on board were the captain and the lamp-trimmer, myself. The steam was allowed to go down until the screw ceased to revolve, and for a space of about twelve hours the big vessel lay quietly awaiting the return of her crew to duty. It is not a pleasant reminiscence, and I gladly leave it.

Of my Christmases on board the *Cachalot*, I can say very little, having dealt with all of them so fully elsewhere, and of the strangest of all, that Christmas on the whale in the Pacific Ocean, especially as I have dealt with it this year for another paper by itself. Really no difference was made between Christmas and any other day either in work or food. Then I come to my ideal

sea Christmas, spent on board the barque *West York* in the North Pacific. A plentiful breakfast of ham and eggs and fruit (we were only lately from Portland, Oregon), a delightful service in the cabin in the morning, with abundance of singing ; a dinner of poultry, potatoes, and plum pudding ; and the rest of the day full of pleasant intercourse one with another, made up the most enjoyable Christmas I have ever spent at sea. And the weather was splendid throughout, as if in harmony with all else. No one, I am sure, felt the need of vinous or spirituous aids to happiness ; indeed, most of us had no use for them. But for sheer downright misery, not to be matched by any of the whaling Christmases I spent, the one in the little Bluenose schooner, in which I was mate (the rest of the crew being the skipper and two boys), bears the palm. All Christmas Day we were turning her down from Bryer Island harbour, Bay of Fundy, to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, in such awful weather that the spray froze as it fell, and incessant exertions were imperative to keep the little craft workable by chipping the ice off her deck and rigging and running gear. At last a frost fog set in, and we were compelled to anchor in Yarmouth, going on being quite out of the question. In that tiny cabin of eight feet square by six high, we four crouched, after we had anchored her, taking it in turns (all but the

little boy, who was sickening for measles) to feed the big and badly-cracked stove lest we should all be frozen stiff. Water dripped from the roof, the coffin-like little bunks were soaked, and the atmosphere was foul. There was nothing to eat but semi-putrid beef and herrings, except potatoes, and to crown the misery, the skipper drank the bottle of square gin he had been saving as a specific for the threatened measles (it was much esteemed in those days in Nova Scotia for that purpose), and was sullenly, dangerously intoxicated, pouring forth a monotonous flood of filthy abuse of all people generally, and us in particular. Action of some sort was imperative, as there was nothing to read, even had reading been possible, so I got out my ditty bag and carefully, methodically, reseated two pairs of flannel pants in superior sea-tailor style. I worked at them as assiduously as if my life depended upon the neatness and expedition with which I executed the job, and when it was finished, my companions in wretchedness being all asleep, I fell asleep also.

In concluding these few rambling remembrances, I must apologize for laying so much stress upon the eating side of the question of Christmas, my only excuse being that it is usually a most important part of the Christmas festivities anywhere, but at sea especially so, the sailors' possible enjoyments being so few. And I am

sure all my friends who read will heartily wish all sailors everywhere this Christmas a full tasty dinner and as happy a day as the peculiar disabilities of their calling will permit.

XVII

A Stormy Christmas

IS it too much to say, I wonder, that the majority of English folk, high or low, rich or poor, do look forward to Christmas as a season of reunion and rejoicing ? I think not. In spite of the many harsh and cynical things said about Christmas—most of them utterly insincere—I feel quite safe in saying that there are few English people, whatever their age or condition, who do not, as the blessed season draws near, feel strangely moved in the direction of universal peace and love.

And yet there are many of our workers to whom Christmas means a time of terrible strain. This comes, I suppose, by operation of that wonderful bye-law of nature that for the good of the whole community some one must suffer here and there. But I do not intend to particularize, except in one instance—that of the sailor. He is, as most of us know, or ought to know, by way of being a vicarious sacrifice, not for the sins of the shore-folk, but in order that they may be

supplied with all they need or want, or, as in the case of the Navy, that the toilers who are bringing luxuries and necessaries to this little group of islands may be protected against the piratical onslaughts of envious neighbours, who apparently can only see in the ever-increasing magnanimity and humanity of Britain more cogent reasons for hating her and all her ways.

But in the Royal Navy a harsh or sorrowful Christmas because of privation or storm or over-work is almost unknown. The reason is not far to seek. Between the seamen of the Navy and their splendid officers there is a strong, sympathetic bond of union for one thing, preventing the possibility of any hardship by reason of short commons while an officer has the wherewithal to provide the materials for a feast ; and for another, it is but seldom that our modern ships are found at sea at Christmas-time, as most commissions are spent in harbour, where, the ship being snugly anchored, all hands may give themselves up to enjoyment of the season. Even those that are at sea have such large crews that only a very few of them need be on watch at a time on a holiday, and especially a holiday like that.

But in the Mercantile Marine an entirely different set of conditions obtains, and my little story deals with a case in point. On December

24, 1878, there sailed from Blackwall one of those splendidly fast clipper sailing-ships that were once our glory and pride, until steam ousted them from their pre-eminence and saw them become the mendicants of the sea. She was a full-rigged ship of 1,200 tons register, beautiful as a yacht, and fairly well manned—with twenty men before the mast, well found, well handled, and well kept. She carried 120 passengers, first class, second class, and steerage, and was bound to Australia. Indeed, so good was the ship and all appertaining to her, that on the bright December morning when she was towed down the Thames there was scarcely a complaint heard at leaving the Old Country on the eve of the great Christian festival and time of home-keeping.

She slipped her tug off Beachy Head that night under a brilliant moon, and the passengers watched with intense interest—the water being so smooth that no sign of sea-sickness had yet appeared—the almost miraculous manner in which the *Albatross* grew into a tower of snow under the deft hands and amid the weird cries of the sailors. Then, as with a freshening breeze the beautiful fabric began to dip and curtsey to the young waves, one by one the spectators retired with perfect confidence in the courage, ability, and faithfulness of those into whose hands they had, humanly speaking, given their lives.

The captain paced the poop uneasily, every little while lifting his face to the moon, across whose face of burnished silver fled an occasional wisp of cloud so thin as to be almost invisible. Then he would look to the westward, where the horizon was wrapped in gloom, pause for a moment in thought, and then resume his hurried stride to and fro. Meanwhile, in the gloomy forecastle, the coming change was being busily discussed. There was a lull in the work, and consequently, merchantship fashion, all hands, except the helmsman and lookout man, were below, the watch "on deck" busily preparing for their night duties, filling pipes, etc., and the watch "below" making themselves as comfortable as possible in their bunks, knowing well how precarious their tenure of sleep would be in such narrow waters.

"In for a fine thing, we are, I c'n see," growled one old A.B. ; "but I don't care, I'd jes's leave be out here in a gale o' wind as be humbugged about in the 'Home' by people who don't care a snap what comes of me 'ceptin' one day a year. Whyn't they let us alone, I wonder ? "

"That's right, Bill, growl away, 't'll do ye good," laughingly replied a fine stalwart seaman of about twenty-eight. "Good job we know you don't mean half what ye say. I lay you was just as glad as me to be took a bit o' notice of last Christmas we spent in the Home in London by

them ladies an' gentlemen what come among us ; least, I didn't hear ye growlin' then. Anyhow, 's far 's I'm concerned I wouldn't ha' missed that day fer anythin'. I didn't know er care anythin' about Christmas before, 'cept as a day t' get boozed on if ye could. But now I do know, I kin feel whatever I'm a-goin' through 'at it's better than He went through, who hadn't got where to lay His head. 'Twas the happiest Christmas, or I ought to say 'twas the only happy Christmas ever I spent, an' the joy of it's lasted me ever since."

" Ah, what r' ye talkin' about ? " snarled a voice from the darkness. " Get out o' this an' let th' watch below go asleep. Anybody'd think ye was runnin' th' Sailors' Welcome Home in th' Highway."

Nothing more was said, for sea etiquette demands imperatively that an invitation to "get out" from the watch below to the watch on deck be obeyed on the instant. On emerging into the outer air, although but a few minutes had elapsed since their retiring, the members of the watch on deck noticed with depressing sensations that the fineness of the weather had disappeared. The sky was almost overcast, and the upper strata of clouds were flying over the face of the pallid moon at great and continually accelerating speed, all the more noticeable because of the gradual

dying away of the wind, which was propelling the ship in the direction from whence those clouds were coming.

A few minutes of waiting in increasing suspense, then, like a thunderclap from aft, came the great voice of the mate : “Clew up royals and top-gallant sails.” Answering cries greeted him, and immediately the heavy night’s work began, rather to the relief of the watch, to whom action was greatly more to be preferred than suspense. But the watch below and the passengers heard and suffered each in their degree, the former in the thought of their sorely-needed rest being in jeopardy, the latter from fear of the unknown, alarm at the strange noises, and the uneasy motion of the ship just feeling the incoming Atlantic swell.

The upper sails were hardly fast before the skipper, in set, stern tones, said to the mate : “Call all hands, Mr. Wilson ; we shall have barely time to get her fore-reaching on the starboard tack before *that* is on us,” waving his hand to the westward.

“Aye, aye, sir,” replied the mate steadily, instantly adding in a shout that rang through the remotest corners of the ship : “All hands on deck. Shorten sail !”

The order was caught up and repeated by half a dozen voices, and immediately followed by

the lowering of the upper topsails, clewing up of foresail and mainsail, and hauling down of lower staysails and jibs. But although there was little delay—things indeed going amazingly smartly for a ship just out of dock with all hands new to her—before the crew could get aloft to handle those huge squares of canvas, the storm wind from the west had leapt upon them like a tiger from its lair, and caught the vessel flat aback. Stern foremost through the hissing sea she was hurled amid an elemental uproar so appalling that an effect of numbness was produced upon the brain. Recovering themselves, and realizing the peril, the crew sprang aloft, tearing with almost savage energy at the plank-like concavities of the sails as the tremendous weight of wind drove them backwards against masts and rigging. Before one sail had been furled, “Down from aloft!” came an order in some mysterious way, rather felt than heard. But when the men reached the deck again and tried to fight their way to the braces to get the yards round, as the ship refused to answer her helm, they found their way hindered by frenzied groups of men, women, and children, clutching frantically at each other, and wailing as if in the agony of death.

Most valiantly in the face of this new danger did the seamen labour to get their helpless charges below again, and, almost incredible as it may

appear, succeeded in so doing just as, by some friendly wave lifting her counter aside for a moment, the ship swung to port, felt her helm, and came round. As she did so the great sails, released from the steady strain upon them, made a few thunderous flappings and disappeared.

Now, accidents of running down apart, the ship was safe for a little while. The fore and aft canvas remained, and with this she could fore-reach, only drifting slowly to leeward. And so with her head pointed towards the French shore, under just the heads of the fore and main topmast staysails, she bore on her broadside the full brunt of the gale, while the weary hours of the night wore away to daylight amid the never-ceasing prayers of the passengers for the latter.

When at last the dreary dawn did steal over the misty, sleet-laden sky it was to find the captain out of his reckoning, and fain to get the ship on the other tack. This was done without much trouble, only it seemed that when her head was pointed towards England again the storm howled louder than ever, while the sea had risen to a dangerous height, breaking over the deeply-laden vessel in masses of white foam which sometimes hid her from stem to stern. Cooking of food was impossible, and exhausted nature had to be sustained by some cold meat, biscuit, and water. The poor passengers were now hardly in a fit

condition to feel apprehension as to their ultimate fate. And let who will make a jest of sea-sickness, it is a terrible thing to watch its effect upon those who are in imminent peril of life—to see how indifferent to their own welfare or that of those dearest to them they become ; how willingly, to all appearance, they go down into the pit.

So with these unhappy ones upon that grey Christmas morning. Mother and child, husband and wife, sat or lay by each other in the stupor of malaise and despair. And on deck the crew, drenched and hungry, but undaunted still, worked as best they could to prepare for the dread calamity that was imminent—sudden collision with vessel or rock, and swift death.

In spite of the universal misery which prevailed, it was noticed by some of his shipmates that one young seaman—he who had spoken up for Christmas so boldly—wore a solemn smile upon his face through all the terror round about. And by some magnetic influence none understood, whenever it was possible to do so, a little group of his shipmates gathered round him. He had a word of cheer for each, not, indeed, of hope that they might be saved from death, for that he did not think likely, but of trust in a loving Father whose children's welfare, in spite of their waywardness and disobedience and ingratitude, was inex-pressibly dear. And it must not be understood

that his ministrations, for such they were, came couched in any formal language. They were just the outpourings of a heart full of love, and, therefore, empty of fear. And their effect was in the last degree remarkable for its steadyng, solemnizing, and consoling effect upon all around him. There had been a noticeable tendency to despair, to let things go, to give way to the combined effects of cold, hunger, fatigue, and fear, but the influence of this one young and ignorant servant of God, endeavouring to pour out upon others the joy with which the Father had filled his life, was as miraculous as the effect upon the storm of the words of our Master.

The weary day wore on to noon without a lull in the gale or a break in the grey pall of driving cloud and fog and sleet overhead. Naught could be heard but the incessant volume of sound made up of the hissing of the spindrift, the howling of the wind and the thunder of the waves.

And at last all their fears and forebodings were focussed at once by the sudden appearance of a barrier of snowy foam, with an awful vibrant roar that dominated the heretofore predominant voice of the storm, under the bows of the ship. There was but a moment's suspense ; no minute was allowed in which to exercise futile seamanship ; the self-announcement of the terror was at once followed by its consummation. The ship was



A great shout is raised as a lithe figure appears just abaft the fore-rigging—*p. 163.*

driven upon the Goodwin Sands. To the undulatory motion of her hull communicated by the uneasy waves now succeeded the horrible jarring of her frame as it was dashed against those treacherous banks. Carlines and beams and planks and stringers were wrenched from their holdings, and yawning gaps broke the contour of her once pleasant decks. A move towards the boats was arrested at once, without orders, for what boat could live in such a combination of sea and shoal ?

What boat, indeed ? The question is answered. Brave British hearts manning a little group of Deal luggers, in default of Christmas dinner cruising in that wild weather to search for one, have seen or scented the calamity, and, like beneficent blood-hounds, have borne down to save. Anchoring well to windward of the wreck, they veer away with utmost care until from the highly canted weather rail of the ship they can receive a flung lead line. Communication is established, and soon one by one the almost moribund passengers are being transferred. There is neither haste nor rest until all the helpless ones and the almost frozen crew have been removed from the fast disintegrating vessel. Even the captain, assumed to be the last, has been hauled on board the foremost lugger, when a great shout is raised as a lithe figure appears just abaft the fore-rigging with a little bundle in his arms. Slack the cable, let

the boat run in to the limit of safety—a big wave snatches her, lifts her high above the ship ; as she falls, the figure springs from the rail of the wreck and clutches the lugger's rigging, descending almost momentarily upon her deck.

“ Hurrah ! Thank God ! ” goes up in a wild cry of joy. All saved !

Slowly, laboriously, but with utmost care, the luggers are hauled to their anchors, close-reefed sails are set, and, with consummate skill, the wonderful craft make their tempestuous way towards Ramsgate, since nearer shelter there may not be found in such an awful gale. By 3 p.m. they are in harbour ; are finding, many of them to their utmost amazement, that they are still alive ; are being conducted, oh, so tenderly, towards the principal hotel, where a smoking feast awaits them—saved to remember that Christmas Day for the rest of their lives. And one mother awakes from a stupor of despair to find that her babe is not lost ; that a young Christian sailor has freely imperilled his own life to save the helpless one, and has had his stormy Christmas crowned with a double joy.

XVIII

The Packet Rat

WHEN a man, especially a sailor-man, gets past fifty it seems almost inevitable that he should speak disparagingly of the new generation taking hold of things, and compare them, to their great disadvantage, with the men of "my day." Not having reached the half century yet, I do not feel disposed to do anything of the kind, realizing that though "the old order changeth, giving place to the new," the supply of good men does not fail, and given opportunities to put them to the proof, they appear and take hold as their forbears did.

In spite of this entirely judicial frame of mind, I am bound to admit that, from a spectacular, a romantic point of view, the sailors of the past appeal much more strongly to me than do the steamboat wallahs of to-day, and I feel strongly that for rearing sailor-men there was, there is, no school like a sailing-ship.

And of all the sailing-ships afloat two generations ago there were none that approached the

"packet ships," those wonderful sailing flyers between Liverpool and New York, for smartness, for speed, for all, in a word, that belongs to seamanship and "sailorizing." The honour of handling them as they were handled was almost equally divided between Americans and Britishers, the genuine article untainted by all the mongrel admixtures of to-day, although I am compelled to say that the young republic, the mightiest child among nations, furnished the great majority of the officers, as she did the ships.

All along the New England coast, fitting birthplace for such monarchs of the sea, almost self-taught shipbuilders produced *Dreadnaughts*, *Donald McKays* and *Young Americas*; ships whose fame will linger yet for generations among seafarers who do not know a Flemish horse from a crane line.

Among such was the *Tecumseh*, 2,000 tons register, carrying the newly-invented double topsails, three skysails and royal stun'-sails. Her officers were New Englanders to a man—that is to say, they combined the unconquerableness of the Ironsides with the large adaptiveness of men of the sea. In the execution of their duty they knew no pity; to get from port to port faster than their compeers was their *summum bonum*; to keep their ship up to an almost unthinkable standard of cleanliness, their idea

of efficiency, and to do deeds that, plainly described, make the hair rise with admiring terror, the everyday incidents of their life.

They took such crews as they could get and moulded—or rather hammered—they to their will. Under their methods of training only the strongest could endure a second passage, and yet such was the fascination they exerted over seamen, that a class of men sprang up who sailed in these ships again and again, voyage after voyage, a different ship each voyage, who became known as “Packet Rats.”

Save for the fact that they never went “heeled,” and their disputes were usually settled with fist or foot, rarely with the knife, they were the prototype of the Western cowboy, only I make bold to say that theirs was a far harder life than his. They often, nay, generally, joined a ship in Liverpool at the last moment, with their wardrobes on their backs, full of filthy liquors, which soon evaporated during the stern conflict with the Irish Sea and under the steady drive of the iron officers. I know one man whose sole equipment for a winter passage to the westward was a suit of canvas and a bucko cap. True, he had more dunnage when he “jumped” in New York, but then he was an ardent believer in the “good old rule, the simple plan.”

Now it befell that one bitter mid-November

day, when the hissing sleet was whipping the eddying waters of the Mersey into a yellow foam, that the *Tecumseh* was lying with her cable short, two hundred and fifty most miserable emigrants sorting themselves out below and only happy in so far that they knew nothing of the terrors that awaited them on the Atlantic, and her Blue Peter flying, awaiting the coming of the captain with the balance of the crew.

At last he arrived, his black eyes glittering with impatience, but his face impassive as a statue's. And as the launch bumped alongside, his voice, not loud, but filling space like thunder, was heard : "Up with ye." Four nondescripts, men undoubtedly, but by appearance referable to no particular order, scrambled inboard, and as they did so that awful voice was heard again : "Man the windlass, Mr. Hampden."

The launch departed, the tug took a strain on the tow line, and twenty-two men, under pressure of authority standing in fear of no restraining law, broke out, catted and fished the anchor, yes, and lashed it for a full due. Those ships were not in the habit of keeping anchors ready to let go once clear of port. And away the *Tecumseh* put to sea under the steady stress of the tug, for Liverpool, even in those days, was famous for the finest towing steamers in the world.

But those were not the days of towing to the

Tuskar. Hardly was she beyond the Formby lightship when sails began to flutter about her here and there, and presently she dropped tug and pilot at once, setting an enormous press of canvas to a westerly gale, and reducing her hapless passengers to a state in comparison with which their previous misery was as paradise. Like all of her class she was a "lively" ship, and as she was deep she was also a "wet" ship. Driven by the mighty leverage of sail piled upon her under the orders of those splendid seamen in charge of her, she tore through the beam sea into a fast coming night amid a halo of spray and to the accompaniment of a weird chorus of complaining top-hamper.

But the human part of her machinery did not groan ; their woes were past speech, and had they attempted to vocalize them they would have met with such stern suppression of complaint that they would have bitten their tongues through rather than say any more. For while in British ships it was a saying, "Growl you may, but go you must," no such permission as to growling was ever accorded in Yankee packets, while the going was always swift, coincident with the order, or the laggard paid promptly in blood and bruises for his weakness. And so, by dint of the intense labour wrung from these twenty-two sufferers from drink and hunger and cold, the stately *Tecumseh*

sped on, a vision of wonder to the slow going coasting craft, a stern delight to her captain and a floating hell to passengers and crew.

At last, when all aloft was as trim as if she had been a week at sea instead of a few hours, the almost exhausted men began to hope wistfully for a spell of rest and a meal. Nothing, however, was further from the mind of the mate than such a concession ; while aught remained lacking to make the ship neat and fit to meet the eagle eye of the captain there could be no slackening off, and his voice, like the roar of a hungry lion, thundered about her issuing fresh order to scrub decks, wash paint-work, re-lash spars, etc.

Then suddenly a gaunt Liverpool Irishman, whose face as well as his rig stamped him “packet rat,” rolled up to the mate and said—

“ Are yez goin’ t’ murdher uz all th’ firrst night out, sorr ? Fer Christ’s sake, let up on uz fer a few minits, or we’ll all be did.”

Only because of his extreme surprise did Mr. Hampden permit the question and statement to be uttered. Then, with a snarl like a wild beast, he sprang at the daring man, and the two were locked in a writhing, kicking heap. The other officers, with Yankee readiness, rushed to the spot, not so much to aid the mate, who they knew was fully capable, but to keep off any possible combination of the crew. But before they had well

reached the fight, the mate had the enfeebled body of Patrick at his disposal, and was showering blows upon it at his will. Finding after a dozen or so that there was no attempt at retaliation, he drew off and allowed Patrick McInerney to rise to his feet and say—

“ Beg pardon, sorr, fer given ye so much throuble, but ye see I’m wake an’ ill an’ forgot where I wuz. What’ll I do now? I’m ready t’ go an wid the wurrk.”

The mate eyed the man as he mechanically smeared the blood from his face and spat out a tooth or two, then he said quietly, with a satisfied air—

“ Get t’ hell forward out of it and get somethin’ t’ eat.”

In a few minutes more the word “ supper ” was passed along, and, aching, trembling bodies were in a small measure comforted with a hot meal of good food, hot tea and a blissful smoke.

After supper the watches were set and kept with that stern attention to watchfulness that allows no weakness of compassion to impair efficiency. By the operation of chance Patrick had the first wheel in the middle watch, being chosen by the mate, who by old sea practice always has the eight hours in on the outward passage. In spite of his condition, of his usage, Patrick steered so well that the mate marked him

as one of those born helmsmen who cannot steer badly, and are in consequence always thought well of at sea.

So, although he had no compunction for his brutality to the man or sympathy with him in his misery, Mr. Hampden sent him at four bells to his bunk, reasoning that he was worth a little privilege like that in order to keep him from collapse, to which he was obviously drawing near. And Patrick, who had never received such a concession before, said, "Thank yer, sorr," rolled forward, and before he had taken a dozen draws at his pipe was fast asleep, his aches and pains forgotten.

It is hardly necessary to descend into the malebolge of the 'tween decks. Fielding or Smollett, or, later, Zola, would have revelled in description of the uncouth heaps of men, women and children lying wallowing in their own vomit, flung from side to side of the dim decks, the thick stench poisoning them, and the wailing of the wind alone mingling with the complaining of the labouring fabric beneath. Amid such conditions did the early builders of the great American nation cross the roaring Atlantic, proving their fitness for the task awaiting them by surviving.

How many died and were hastily committed to the hungry waves is not on record, nor need be. They fell in the forefront of a great battle, name-

less rank and file, and found the peace that earth denied them. Nor must we blame the men in authority in those ships for callous indifference to the sufferings of their human freight. Their task was heavy enough—to get the ship to her journey's end in the shortest possible time, and to maintain by the force of their own personality and courage that discipline among their half-savage crews without which those ships would never have reached port at all.

No, our concern is from henceforth with Patrick McInerney, the packet rat. Throughout the stern days that followed the ship's departure she was hurled indomitably westward against the winter gales, oftentimes barely holding her own under three close reefed topsails, and at the first slant having all she could drag of sail piled on her in the never ceasing struggle to outface the forces of nature combining to drive her back.

In those days every passage west was an Iliad, unsung it is true, but what conflict between Greeks and Trojans ever attained the grandeur, the ferocity of those continually recurring battles between man on the one side and the might of Atlantic waves and gales on the other ? Coming east was all right. Before the brave westerlies the great ships fled joyously, swiftly, like homing gulls, reaching sometimes a record of four hundred miles per nautical day. But the *Tecumseh* was

going west and battling every cable's length of the way.

Now, Patrick McInerney, packet rat, was a man of no ideals beyond a big drink and tobacco, but somehow the one kindly action of Mr. Hampden loomed amazingly in his limited imagination. Also it cost him sixteen fights. A little thing like that in a packet ship sufficed to arouse the fiercest jealousy on the part of the recipient's shipmates.

And so it naturally befell that he was compelled to make it clear to his fellows in the foc'sle that he was in no sense favoured of fortune, that his first arrival at weather earring or topsail halliards was in no sense due to his wish to curry favour or get off work-up jobs, but a direct consequence of the ability and energy inherent to a born seaman.

His was the example, that, in the life and death struggle with plank-hard cotton canvas aloft, when the vicious slat of the demoniacal sails tore off finger nails and battered heads until time and place and work were enfolded in one dull struggle to do or die, kept the rest of the men on the yard from failing and got the writhing area of frozen canvas snugly fast. He led the way, untiring, unconquerable, ever ready at the call, and last to retreat at "That'll do the watch."

And so curiously are we made that it was Patrick McInerney who found time in his scanty leisure of watch below to do a little for some pale

heroine with a quartet of children, a little washing or nursing, or sometimes just a cheery lie to keep hope alive in a heart from which it had nearly fled. Drunken, blasphemous, reckless Patrick, to all outward seeming purely animal in courage and ferocity, yet who can tell what, under happier auspices, you might have been ?

The log of that passage, to a landsman, would have been a bald and uninteresting record, but under the plainness of its language there was concealed a list of heroic deeds almost unsurpassable. Not the least of the troubles encountered by the *Tecumseh* was the persistent absence from view of the heavenly bodies. From the time when she emerged into the wide elemental uproar of the Atlantic until the end, her saturnine commander saw but one blink of sun, and that was at a time when only the most expert navigator could have made use of it for obtaining the longitude.

Yet, so careful was the attention paid to log and course, so full the experience of the captain, that whenever (it was but rarely) there came a "slant" in the midst of the prevailing opposition of the gales, her course was laid direct for Sandy Hook, as if taking a departure from yesternoon's well ascertained positions, and no one could have divined from any appearance of uncertainty that Captain Van Rensselaer was not entirely satisfied as to his place upon the inscrutable deep. No one,

that is, of the crew; as far as the emigrants were concerned, they had long ago settled down to that dull, almost hopeless, endurance which in people long past feeling or comprehension takes the place of resignation, and is often mistaken for it. It is, instead, the mute acquiescence of benumbed nerve centres in a state of things entirely repugnant but almost inevitable, and accounts for people living through privations which seem to the normal perception unendurable.

Thirty days had thus dragged their gloomy length along, and even the steel framed officers were beginning to show unmistakable signs of strain. Their voices rang resonant as ever, their eyes shone brightly as at first leaving Liverpool, but hollow cheeks and bagging clothes told a tale of stress and drag that would not be contradicted. And if the officers, well fed and comfortably housed, were thus worn, what of the crew? Strangely enough, they were fitter than ever, because they did not think. They ate and slept and toiled, savagely, continuously, but from the absence of any responsibility, they did not fail bodily. Patrick alone, among the whole of the fore-mast hands, although, if anything, more fiercely energetic than ever, exhibited signs of feeling the tremendous strain of the passage.

Of the reason he himself was barely conscious, would have furiously repudiated it had any one

suggested it to him, but it was none the less real.

Among the emigrants was a sweet faced Irish girl, with two young children, going to join her husband, who had gained a foothold in the new land. Toward her, in her helplessness and innocence, Patrick had felt strangely drawn, and for the sake of her and the two babes he had given up many an hour of sorely needed rest.

In him she saw just a big kind crachure, fond of childer, and willin' to help, the while her soft, loving heart was ever dwelling upon poor Thady, awaiting her over this cruel say.

To him she was a sweet, suffering angel, bearing without complaint, and, indeed, with a sweet smile, privation such as he felt should be the lot of no woman on earth. That he loved her never dawned upon his limited mind, but that he could and would, given occasion, gladly die to give her ease and safety, was perfectly clear to him. This it was that brought into his eyes a far-away look of tender self-sacrifice, that made his meditations during wheel and lookout full of a delight he had never known before. He was tasting the highest anticipations of regenerated man, the prospect of gladly giving all without expectation of return or reward.

Then there came a night when amid a hurricane of orders, faintly heard amid the almost cosmical

uproar of the elements, the ship was suddenly brought to the wind. She had been under far too heavy a burden of canvas for prudence, but excusable because of the need to get west, fleeing before a fierce storm from the north-north-east. The night was black, the snow blinding, yet withal the glare of the sea beneath dazzled the smarting eyes eagerly peering through the dark for sign of danger. For without a word being spoken to any of the foremast hands, all felt that they were nearing land ; every man instinctively realized that close by was death in the shape of snarling rocks and fierce unopposable currents.

Suddenly, like the trumpet of doom, the great voice of the captain was heard above the tumult of wind and wave, "All hands shorten sail ; stand by to bring ship to the wind !" Swiftly they sprang to the call, top-gallant sails, topmast stay-sails and jib were clewed up and hauled down, and amid the howling of orders the well-trained men sprang aloft to furl. But they had barely reached the yards when yells of "Down from aloft, lee braces, all hands !" came faintly up to them, and with many a curse at their useless journey they descended, Patrick foremost, as usual, by slithering down a top-gallant backstay to windward.

Careful disposition of their forces followed, for it was necessary to brace up all three sets of yards

at once, and meanwhile the upper topsails came slowly down as their halliards were let go ; but the savage wind holding up the ponderous yards seemed determined to frustrate the desires of the men to get her snugged down. Then, while the weather braces were being eased off, a mighty blast struck her, the helmsman missed a spoke of the wheel and, snatching at another, was flung over it like a rag. The *Tecumseh* flew up into the wind like a mad thing, her three topmasts going at the caps like sticks of celery between the fingers. Striving amid the hustling downward of all that massive gear, the wailing cries of the sailors as they hauled at the lee braces ceased not, nor did the inrush of water over the lee rail, as the ship went over to her bearings under the tremendous blast, prevent the man whose duty it was to do so from belaying his brace firmly before struggling to windward out of the welter of foaming sea and entangling gear.

The next two or three hours passed like a maniac's dream. Hacking, sawing, tearing with teeth and nails at the wreckage to leeward ; drowning, battered, but still fighting, the men did all that men might do to get those dreadful jagged spars clear of the ship ere they stove in her planking. Perhaps they had become unconscious of danger in the delirium of that struggle, as they were undoubtedly beyond feeling bruises

and fatigue. And at last she rode easier, the heart sickening blows under her bilge ceased, and the carpenter reported only eight inches of water in the well. The work eased off a bit, men recovered their sense of pain and began to mutter to themselves about their hurts.

They had, of course, little leisure for self-examination or pity, because of the need to clear away the raffle of gear that was encumbering the decks. Some of them, doubtless, had a sub-consciousness of savage satisfaction that those particular enemies of theirs, the mighty sails, had gone by the board with the masts, but that in no wise hindered their cruel toil, their almost superhuman attempts to obey the commands of the officers, who seemingly were incapable of feeling any sensation of weariness as they were undoubtedly unable to sympathize with the sufferings of their subordinates.

As yet no member of the crew had any certain knowledge of the fearful danger so near them. With the exception of that well-known (to seamen) smell of the land which will persist in working to windward against the fiercest gale, and a certain indefinite change in the heave and scend of the sea, there was nothing to guide. Only the skipper was certain that his splendid ship was on a lee shore, and, owing to the loss of his top-hamper, practically helpless. So as night, black, ominous

and all concealing, closed in upon them, the almost worn-out crew was driven harder than ever, in order to get some jury rig in place that would stand the strain of the never easing gale.

Of the condition of the landsfolk below no one thought except Patrick—they had ample occupation for their brains in their present duties ; but he, as if endowed with a dual personality, saw continually before his spiritual eyes the pathetic face of Norah O'Brien, clasping her two children to her bosom and peering through the horrible gloom for some glimpse of the Canaan of her hopes. Nor did this permanent vision hinder his usefulness ; rather it spurred him on, refusing to allow the mechanical part of him to acknowledge defeat.

It wanted ten minutes of midnight when, accompanied by a scream that dumbed the gale, a jet of flame burst upward from the forehatch and, caught by the wind, curved outboard to leeward, like the sword of Azrael. For a moment or two all the labouring crew stood awe-stricken, motionless ; then, with a yell of “ Come on ! ” simultaneously with the thunder of the captain’s voice marshalling his forces to meet the new enemy, Patrick sprang to the main hatch and began to tear at the wedges as if endowed with a Titan’s strength. But even in that awful hour the stern discipline practised so continually in those ships held good, was equal to the strain upon it,

and in five minutes there was an organized attack being made upon the fire, while a selected contingent attended to the preparation of the boats, those very slender means of escape. And a loud voice, like the herald of doom, rang out from aloft somewhere, "Breakers all along the lee beam!"

Steadily, ruthlessly, the shivering, demoralized crowd from below were herded into groups aft, held from breaking into panic by men armed with revolvers, while the preparations for leaving the doomed ship were completed, and her human freight were led and pushed and driven towards the various boats.

But while this work was a-doing the unhindered fire gained upon the workers with frightful rapidity, driving the toiling men from their stations in enveloping clouds of flame. The ship struck, heeled over like a dying thing, trembling in every timber, and one by one the boats dropped into the water, miraculously preserved from destruction, while the helpless passengers were lowered or flung into them. As soon as they were loaded they pushed off into the thickness, all unknowing whether the next moment would not see them engulfed in that line of boiling surf whose voice of dread really dominated all other sounds.

As usual, the last man to leave was the captain. At least he intended to be. But he did not,

could not, know that Patrick McInerney, the packet rat, ubiquitous, all-seeing, had missed from the crowds that had filled the boats one face, one little burdened body. Or that, having done his duty to the mass, he was now groping his way below, where amid rending timbers, hissing flame, and spurting brine, Norah O'Brien crouched forgotten of all save one, with her darlings held tight to her loving bosom. With a moan of delight, Patrick found them. Snatching a blanket he flung it around them. With a veritable fury of strength he tore aft with them, the flames snarling behind him, and up the after hatch, to find they were alone. And all that remained of a possible piece of floatable timber was a bucket rack on the poop. Laying his burden gently down, he quite coolly cut the signal halyards off as high as he could reach, and methodically lashed mother and children, quiescent, almost insensible with terror of the time, upon the light structure. Then, as the ship heeled further over and a wide gap opened in her side, he stooped for the first and last time to the pale face of the only woman that had ever touched his lonely heart. And with a muttered "God befrind yez, an' save yez," he launched them and fell, done, but perfectly happy. A big wave broke aboard and carried him away to certain peace.

Of all the crowd that fled that night not one

was lost, and nobody missed Patrick, save the little woman. She, sitting by her Thady's side in Albany, would often try and piece together for him the fragments of what seemed like a fearful dream, and was always dissatisfied with the result. But she always wound up by saying, "An', Thady, he kissed me here," touching her brow between the eyes, "an' thin he wint straight home to his God."

XIX

The Testing of the Mate

VERY proudly did Harry Windham conduct his young bride up the accommodation ladder laid on to the dummy in the S.W. India Docks and on board of his first command, the four-masted steel ship *Comstock*. The elderly mate standing at the gangway with an expression on his brick-red face intended for a smile, and black envy gnawing at his liver, said as pleasantly as he could : “ Welcome on board the *Comstock*, ma’am. Good-morning, Captain Windham,” out loud, but the undercurrent of his speech ran “ Nice thing for me. Have to run the whole shebang and dry nuss them two kids, the second an’ third, as well. An’ if anything goes wrong—same old yarn, ‘ We got her ashore but I got her off.’ Who wouldn’t sell a farm an’ go to sea ? ” And as the loving couple, after returning his salute, stepped briskly aft to the pretty saloon, the soured man thought of his hard-featured, anxious wife in their 10s. 6d. a week house at East Ham trying

to make both ends meet on his half-pay of four pounds a month, and bring up their four children respectably. At last he said to himself with a sigh : " Ah, well, growlin' won't do no good, anyhow. Better go aft, I s'pose, and see what the 'old man's' got t' say 'bout things."

So having given a comprehensive look round, he rolled aft and entered the saloon with that curious mixture of deference and privilege always noticeable in the officers of a merchant-ship, an air which they get rid of with wonderful suddenness when they become masters. Fingering his cap, he approached the young master, who sat at the head of the table looking eagerly over some papers, with an obvious effort to appear at his ease in his new position. Looking up at the mate's approach, he said : " Oh, Mr. Seaton, I'm glad you've come in ; I wanted to have a talk with you. I want to tell you that the owners have been kind enough to sanction my wife sailing with me, and I look to your kindly help to make things as comfortable for her as we can. I like the look of the ship. How does she behave herself running ? " " Oh, as for that, sir, you'll find her all right—wet, of course, when she's down to her marks, but as good a seaboat as there is going. What about the crew, sir ? Will you select 'em yourself or leave it to me ? " " Oh, I'll leave it to you, Mr. Seaton, but try and get as good a crowd as you can. I don't

want to take any chances in a four-poster like this with a crowd of tramp labourers who wouldn't know a sheer-pole from a handspike. And, besides, there's my wife to be thought about—oh, here she is. My dear, let me introduce you to the chief officer, Mr. Seaton, the most important man in the ship." Mrs. Windham, a fair blue-eyed darling of twenty, smiled so sweetly on the poor old mate as she shook hands that he inwardly vowed to serve her like a knight of old ; his salt-encrusted heart grew quite soft at sight of her youth and beauty and happiness. Inwardly he swore that if the skipper didn't keep straight, he, the mate, would be athwart his hawse in less than no time, with other rubbish of the kind that is always ready to bubble up in an old sailor's mind on the smallest provocation.

He was recalled to himself by a hoarse voice at the door of the saloon demanding a receipt for something, and with a muttered apology he hurried away. Then one duty followed upon another so fast that during the few days remaining before sailing he got no opportunity to pass even the time of day with his divinity. And the young brass-bedecked second and third mates wondered why on earth their old chief was so vilely cross with them, so evil-tempered that nothing they did seemed to be right. They did not dream that it was because he had several times seen them

assisting Mrs. Windham to come on board or go ashore, had seen her smile sweetly upon them, and could hardly contain his anger in consequence. But if his folly in this direction made him miserable it also fired his energy. He drove his underlings to the verge of madness, especially the six apprentices, who, having been to their several homes and there experienced that mild sort of hero-worship usually offered to embryo sailors on their holidays, felt horribly aggrieved at being roused about scrubbing, polishing brass, and clearing out obscure corners of lockers. Nor did this exhaust the mate's energies. He exercised so severe a scrutiny over the candidates for A.B. that came seeking berths that the stevedores who heard his questionings were amazed, and prophesied that he wouldn't get a crew at all. They were quite wrong. He got a splendid crew of Scandinavians, big brawny fellows, submissive as lambs, speaking good English, and well up to their work.

So far, so good. But Mr. Seaton's well-laid plans were presently to receive a complete smash up. He was looking forward to the time when, at sea, those two frivolous youngsters, Daykin and Bland, the second and third officers, would be shut out of the heaven of the saloon except at meal-times, while he, occupying a state-room therein, would every watch below be privileged

to enjoy that blissful society. To him the morning before sailing came the skipper beaming : “ Mr. Seaton, you’ll be glad to know we’ll have company—six first-class passengers, four gentlemen and two ladies. They are all middle-aged, and are going with us to Sydney for the benefit of their health. I hope you’ll be able to keep your berth in the saloon ; but if need should arise you’ll have to shift into the second mate’s berth and make him share berths with the third.”

But why dwell further upon the mate’s mortification ? Let us rather draw a kindly veil over things, especially over his tribulations while getting the *Comstock* to sea, his unwillingness to recognize that, in his young skipper as well as in the young officers, he had found as good seamen as a man could wish to sail with. He was in the unhappy position of being an old sailor with nothing to growl at. Fine weather, steady winds, first-class crew, good officers, good food, everything right but himself, and he, with a wife and four children at home, hopelessly in love with and madly jealous of any one who approached a woman the age of his eldest daughter. What a nest of vultures to be gnawing at the vitals of a man of fifty. All sorts of madly impossible schemes revolved in his mind. If only something would happen—a hurricane, a fire, destruction of some kind from which he could rescue her, save her when all these

young whipper-snappers, including her husband, should fail and perish. Then when only she and himself should safely gain the shore of some lonely isle—and his eyes flashed into the irresponsible night, his heart was as a glowing coal. And he never once thought of himself sanely as a middle-aged fool.

Meanwhile Mrs. Windham, with her dear husband and, when she needed it, congenial company in the saloon, was supremely happy. She was one of those lovable creatures who are naturally glad and love to see all faces bright about them. So she could not but note the mate's gloom, and was often startled at the sudden flash of brightness, the curious deepening of his tan when she spoke to him. Many a merry laugh she and her husband had over the bashfulness of the "old chap," as they called him to one another, little dreaming what underlay it. But as the beautiful passage wore on, this strange behaviour on the old mate's part became so familiar that no notice whatever was taken of it, except the usual growl in the fore-castle and the constant irritation shown by the two young officers, who could not for the life of them see why the mate's age should give him any right to be in such an unreasonable and continuously cantankerous mood. Like sensible youngsters though, they did not brood over it, but went blithely about their work and enjoyed

the pleasant society aft as much as they could whenever they were admitted to it.

And nothing happened to mar anybody's peace of mind. Fine weather, good crew, pleasant company—all was ideal. Mr. Seaton's long meditations in the night watches affected no one directly but himself, and since those affected indirectly knew not the source of their woes, there was no trouble on that account. Only the genial young skipper did permit himself occasionally to wish that Mr. Seaton wouldn't be such a fidget, more like an old maid than a man of vast sea experience. This, however, reached nobody's ears except Mrs. Windham's, and even to her the skipper admitted that he would have to look a long way before finding such a capable chief officer.

A splendid voyage of eighty-two days ended at Sydney without a single sea accident worth chronicling for the reading of seekers after sensation. I beg my readers to believe that such passages are not at all unusual, many instances being known to me personally of colonial and Indian passages, thirteen to sixteen thousand miles of ocean sailing, without any exciting incidents whatever and with generally favouring winds as well as fine weather. Proudly the big four-master swung into the lovely harbour, and was towed to her berth at Circular Quay, her skipper in the highest of high spirits and her passengers

ready to give him all the credit for their beautiful journey. Even Mr. Seaton was rewarded, for after the skipper had gone ashore to enter his ship inwards, Mrs. Windham engaged the mate in conversation as he stood on the poop watching his men putting the final touches on the clearing-up. To her amazement he became transfigured. His eyes sparkled, his talk was absolutely brilliant, and his somewhat ungainly figure straightened itself as he drew from his stores of memory all manner of reminiscences for her entertainment. For over an hour they talked thus, she with a dim idea that she had too much neglected the worthy officer, he with his heart on fire and almost unconscious of his middle age. And also, such was the glamour over him, for the time oblivious of East Ham and that poor nook wherein his chief responsibilities lay.

Thenceforward, until the ship had discharged and loaded (coal from the adjacent port of Newcastle) for San Francisco, although Mr. Seaton was more than busy most of his working hours, he was not far from being the happiest man on board. Far too much of his scanty pay went for the purchase of flowers wherewith to decorate his cabin (he was now living in the saloon again, of course) and to hand the steward for the purpose of ornamenting the table at such meal-times as Mrs. Windham graced it with her presence. Also

the expense of his own personal upkeep in appearance increased, although he scarcely ever went ashore. But still he was extravagant as never before, and his consequent stylishness came in for much sarcastic comment by the rest of the crew, of which he was happily entirely unconscious. The skipper, however, only noticed one thing, which was that Mr. Seaton was the very best chief officer he had ever seen, that everything went on greased wheels under his supervision, and that the *Comstock* was the smartest-looking and best-kept ship in the two harbours. So the middle part of the voyage commenced auspiciously enough.

Only commenced ; for a week after they had left Newcastle and were just feeling the first of the south-east Trades, Captain Windham fell ill of some mysterious malady beyond his own or the mate's elementary skill to diagnose. Mrs. Windham's devotion to her perfectly helpless husband was beyond all praise, but under the stress of this calamity Mr. Seaton developed an entirely new side of his character. Up till then he had appeared in the eyes of all the crew, with the exception of the skipper, as an infatuated old fool, who, in spite of his seamanship, made himself ridiculous by his being obviously in love with another man's wife, and she, besides being just married, young enough to be his daughter. Now

he passed at one bound to their utmost respect, for his care of the sick man and the almost distracted wife was that of a perfectly wise father, making up in devotion and sound sense what he lacked in medical knowledge. And upon the ship he piled endless devices in the way of wind-savers. The man seemed to possess a perfect genius for inventing queer auxiliaries in the way of sails, added to the most splendid seamanship in handling the vessel. At the slightest change of wind he was on deck instantly, he seemed never to tire, and, moreover, succeeded in imbuing his juniors with the same ardent spirit.

In the midst of this strenuous time, when it seemed as if a miracle must be needed to save the suffering skipper's life, the second mate was astounded to receive a sudden summons, in the midst of his watch below from 12 till 4 a.m., to attend the mate on the poop. Arriving there in two minutes, Mr. Seaton faced him with, "Mr. Daykin, the cargo is on fire. I discovered it ten minutes ago, and no one knows of it but me. Now I want you to see that every crevice that can admit air to the hold is cinched up tight as you can get it. Then get the carpenter to cut a hole in the fore part of the main-hatch just big enough to get the nozzle of the hose through, and start the pump. I think we can dowsse the fire if I am right in my estimation of its whereabouts. But whatever you

do, no fuss, no unnecessary noise, for the skipper's very low, and any sudden shock might kill him." Daykin took one glance at the worn face and keen eyes, recognizing to the full the man behind them, then said quietly : " All right, Mr. Seaton, you can depend I'll do my best," and went, lifted on to the highest plane of determination.

So while Daykin and the rest of the crew went silently about their task of fighting the enemy which threatened them all, Mr. Seaton divided his attention between the ship's course and the sick man's cabin, his keen ear telling him how things were going. Mrs. Windham, worn out with sorrow and long watching, was sleeping in the outer berth, and the steward, a bright and clever mulatto, was watching the skipper, when, just as dawn was breaking, Mr. Seaton came down and saw that a crisis had come.

There was a change in the sick man's pale face, but whether for better or worse the mate did not know. But suddenly an intense desire to see this young man live came over him, a longing that had all the force of a prayer, followed immediately by an almost triumphant assurance that it would be so. The skipper opened his eyes and smiled. He was too weak to move, but, answering the look of inquiry, Mr. Seaton put his face close down to the pale lips and heard the whisper, " How is she ? " " Better," said the mate

cheerily, "and so are you. You'll soon be up again, I'm sure, now you've turned the corner." There was a grateful look, the eyelids dropped, and the skipper, giving a contented sigh, sank into a sweet sleep, lifted over the "dead centre," where so many remain, by the will power of his friend.

Rather wearily dragging himself on to the poop again, the mate greeted the new day with that sense of satisfaction it always brings to such toilers, then turned to meet the second mate, who came to report his belief that the fire was being steadily overcome, for that its seat was manifestly in the vicinity of the main-hatch. But it was decided to keep on at the pumps until all danger was past, and then turn to and pump her out before opening the hatches to see whether their hopes were realized. So all that day, by reliefs, the pump steadily sent its thick stream of sea down into the black mass below, and the mate, having seen to it that his patient was cool and steadily gaining on the baffled dark shadow behind him, obtained four hours of hard-earned sleep. When he woke it was to be told that Mrs. Windham wished to speak to him. He had purposely avoided raising her hopes till the matter was beyond a doubt, but her keen eyes of love had seen the change, and spite of inexperience, she felt sure that something favourable had

happened. When Mr. Seaton confirmed her hopes she took his two huge hands in hers and said : " You good man, you have saved three lives. God bless you." And, sinking on the couch, she burst into silent tears. In that moment he was the happiest man on earth ; and saying brokenly, " Cheer up, don't cry, it's all right now," he went on deck ready for any fate that might befall, the supreme joy of that moment his for ever.

Of course, according to the general idea (in fiction), this man should have allowed his love to get the bit between its teeth, let the skipper die in a hurry, help the fire in the hold, and prove his anti-Philistinism by wading through crime in order to possess the person of the loved one. But the facts are against him, poor man, and I am afraid he only succeeded in doing his simple duty under the stress of a love that seems ridiculous but cannot be. And so my jog-trot chronicle goes on to record how, with the fire quite subdued, after several days and nights of anxiety, the skipper convalescent enough to be carried on deck and take an intelligent interest, if not active part, in the work going on, the *Comstock* entered the Golden Gates and dropped anchor in the splendid harbour of the Queen City of the West. It was well and smartly done, American pilots being among the best of their noble calling throughout

the world ; but while the men were aloft giving the sails a harbour furl, with the skipper's wan face lighting up approvingly, a boat came alongside pulled by four men. She made fast, and a huge fellow, in well-fitting clothes and slouch hat, climbed the side-ladder, and sat down nonchalantly on the gangway, regarding the vessel generally as if she were his personal property. Upon Mr. Seaton's observing him seated there, the idea entered the mate's mind that this was a man to be dealt with, and that speedily. So, approaching him, the officer said quietly : "What do you want, my man ?" The new-comer turned a scarred and sinister face towards the speaker, at the same time producing a plug of tobacco and taking a huge bite. Having returned the plug to his pocket, he said drawlingly : " Guess that's none o' yer —— business anyway. Run 'long 'n play like a good boy." All the British blood boiled up in the mate's body, and, making two steps towards the ruffian, he shouted : " Git out o' this at once, d'ye hear ?" And would no doubt have laid violent hands upon the man, despite the difference in their size, but that the visitor produced from his coat-pocket a large revolver as one might a card-case, and, pointing it at the mate's head, said : " See here, Johnny, I'd jes' 's soon shoot ye as look, only I'm a quiet sort of man when I ain't riled. Now you go 'way 'n

mind yer knittin', an' don't fergit that this 's God's own country, a free country, an' ye cain't come none o' yer lime-juice tricks here. Hain't been in 'Frisco before, hev ye ? " Now Seaton was as brave as he ought to be, so, disregarding the revolver, he sprang at the man, who fired as coolly as if he had been practising at a target, and the mate went down.

At the shot three of the men in the boat rushed up the ladder in time to confront the crew, who came sliding down the backstays to find themselves faced by sudden death at the mouths of four revolvers ; and whatever their previous intentions might have been, all of them at once assumed as uninterested an air as possible. The second and third officers went quietly to the help of their bleeding superior, carrying him into the cabin, and rendering such aid as they knew how until medical assistance could be procured.

Meanwhile the visitors dominated the deck, the pilot quietly descending into his boat, with a matter-of-fact salute to the principal ruffian, as if the latter had been engaged in the most peaceful of pursuits instead of having just perpetrated an act of piracy. The pilot had no sooner departed than the leading visitor sauntered forward to where the crew were standing undecidedly, if it be not derogatory to the manhood of a good crowd to say so, like shepherdless sheep. To them the ruffian, with

what he meant for an ingratiating grin : "Naow then, boys, git that dunnage put up, an' over the side with it. Sh'd think ye'd hed enough o' lime-juicin'. Wages 'way up, thirty a month 'n two months' advance, an' plenty ships. Come, hurry up an' make the 'quaintance o' God's own country." One man said in a doubtful voice : "She ain't a bad sheep unt I got eighteen poun' comin' t' me, I don't vant to leaf her." "N'r me needer," chorused several others. The crimp's face darkened. "Look here," he growled, "I don't want no foolin' round with a lot er square heads, 'r ye goin' t' git that dunnage out, 'r ye goin' 'thout it ?" And he ostentatiously played with his revolver.

There is no need to linger over the familiar sordid scene in which the very scum and dregs of criminal humanity break laws cheerfully, being "solid," as they call it, with law administrators ; it is sufficient to say that the whole crew were cleared out as if they had been bought slaves, and the fine British ship was left at anchor unmanned except by her officers and apprentices. Of course, help had to be lavishly paid for, and equally, of course, the same contemptuous indifference was paid to the complaints made by the skipper, who laid the whole case before the authorities at the risk of his life. Nothing was done, as nothing ever is done, to punish the miscreants, and the

Comstock lay crewless for the remainder of her stay. Of course, in this case there was a set-off against the heavy expense in the left wages of the unhappy crew, who found themselves off to sea the next day or so with two months' advance to work up for the benefit of the gentleman who had invited them ashore.

The wounded mate progressed favourably, the bullet having gone through his neck without doing him deadly harm. And as some compensation for his sufferings, Mrs. Windham nursed him devotedly, agreeing with her husband that it was the least return she could make for all his devotion to them both. To himself he said that it was the happiest time of his life, although an occasional qualm at his utter forgetfulness of the partner in East Ham passed over him. Still he dismissed them with the consoling thought that he was quite innocent in intention and deed, and if his thoughts were disloyal he couldn't help it. And so the time passed, all too quickly for him, and presently he took hold again as briskly as if rejuvenated, not at all to the content of his junior, who, while pitying him, had rather enjoyed his retirement from a too active supervision of affairs.

Then came the miserable business of getting a crew. Captain Windham first found that a payment of ten dollars per man obtained was essential, the truly devilish mulct known as "blood-money."

Without this preliminary he could not get one seaman. Next, that he must not be too fastidious ; that men might be brought on board helpless (having been drugged or stunned by merciless blows), and, finally, that after the trouble he had given "our respected fellow-citizen Hank Morgan," by compelling him to shoot the mate, he might think himself fortunate to get any crew at all. Wondering rather at this curious development of American freedom, the young skipper was wise enough to say nothing, but awaited, with what patience he could muster, the arrival of his crew. On the night before sailing they (the crew) arrived in the midst of a furious thunder-storm, and to a running accompaniment of cursings and blows were dragged and driven on board. The worthy slave-dealer who had sold them then sauntered aft and said : " Wall, so long, cap'. Ye've a likely crowd thar ; but I guess you'd better git on to blue water soon, er some on 'em's likely to give a few trouble 'f y' ain't outside." The skipper, disgusted, answered him not a word, but at daybreak, mustering such of the hardly entreated wretches as were able to turn to, weighed and put to sea, entirely thankful to get away from the Queen City of the West.

A good offing having been made, Captain Windham called his officers around him, and handed each a revolver which he had purchased in San

Francisco, warning them as to the use of these handy weapons. Then commenced a series of attempts to muster the crew. A long time elapsed before this was done, and when at last they all appeared, it seemed almost advisable to put back again, so strange and motley a crowd were they. But strangest of all was a figure whose contour was corpulent in the extreme, and who seemed reluctant to come forward, or dazed with ill-treatment. None of the others took much notice of this strange member of their company ; poor wretches, they had lost for the time all interest in life. Finally, Mr. Seaton, taking the stout person by the arm, pulled off a blood-stained wrapper which hid the face. It turned towards him and a faint voice said : "For God's sake, don't hurt me, I'm a woman." And so she was, a woman of fifty-five, the mother-in-law of the crimp who had supplied the crew, and who had taken this novel but convenient method of getting rid of her. Seaton led her aft and showed her to the skipper, who, hearing her sad story and believing some of it, treated her kindly, and made her attendant upon his wife ; secretly rejoicing, too, for a reason soon to become obvious.

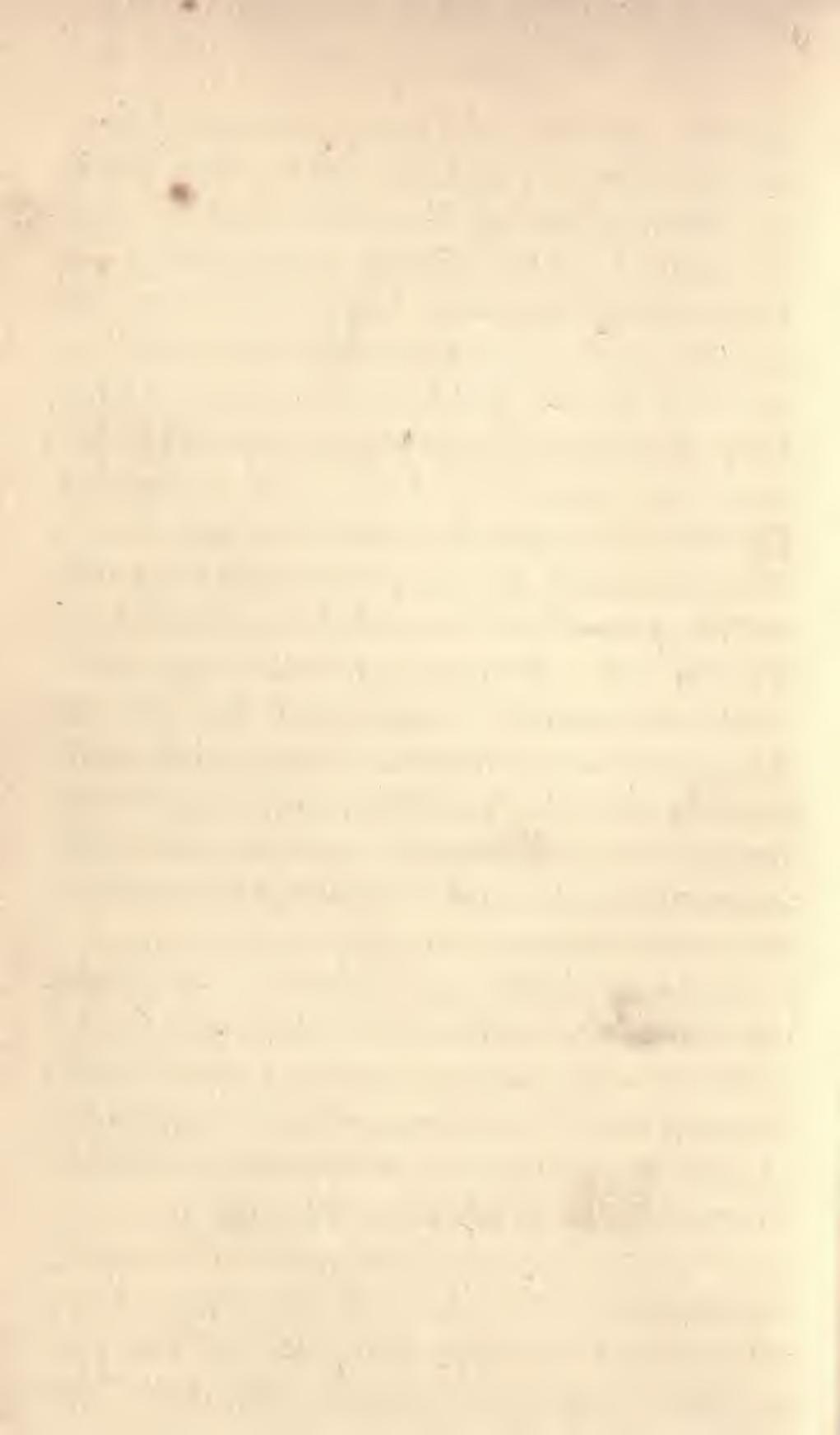
But it was very soon found that, whatever benefit Mrs. Windham might derive from Mrs. Bradley's presence on board, no one else was likely to regard it with pleasure. For she was a

veritable demon of discord, whose every word was full of venom. And to crown her iniquities, she made love to the mate—not secretly, but with all the glare of publicity, shamelessly, and apparently rejoicing in the condition of things she was bringing about. At first, of course, with the exception of Mr. Seaton and Mrs. Windham, all hands found considerable amusement in this curious state of affairs, but as time wore on, and discipline became impossible to maintain, matters grew too serious to be laughed at, except by the crew and the apprentices. She was threatened with irons and imprisonment, she retaliated by declaring that if they attempted such a thing she would seek an asylum among the crew and foment a mutiny, besides absolutely refusing to render any assistance to Mrs. Windham in her approaching time of need. So matters came to a deadlock, and the faces of the afterguard grew longer and longer.

At last Mr. Seaton, pale but resolute, approached the virago, as seated at the foot of the poop ladder outside his room she seemed to gloat over the situation. “Jenny,” said he, “it’s a lovely evenin’, isn’t it ?” “ ‘Tis that,” she replied, “an’ I’m thankful to see it’s makin’ you feel a bit reasonable.” “Ah, don’t be angry with me, Jenny,” murmured the martyr, “I didn’t know my own mind. But forgive me, won’t ye ? an’ I won’t treat you scornfully any more.” Little

more was said, but the sound of kissing was heard, and an echo of ribald chuckling. Thus began Mr. Seaton's penance, his sacrifice, and it lasted all the rest of the passage. Not without its humorous side, of course, but sad in view of the fact that no one gave him credit for the services he was rendering to all hands. It would take many pages to tell of the curious courting of the mate by this elderly Venus, and his almost pathetic submission to it for the sake of others. But already this chronicle hath reached its limit, and it must suffice to say that on arrival in the Thames, by connivance of the skipper, poor Seaton was aided to escape, and Mrs. Bradley, by a judicious combination of threats, persuasion and the payment of twelve pounds wages, was induced to disappear into London's labyrinth, from whence, as far as Mr. Seaton was concerned, she never emerged.

And it is gratifying to record that Mr. Seaton, upon Captain Windham's taking command of a steamer, was appointed master of the *Comstock*, meeting at last with some reward for his long and faithful service to the sea generally and to his ship-mates of the *Comstock* in particular.



XX

The Mutiny of the *Maiden Queen*

BRIGHTLY and cheerfully the sun shone down upon the crowded water area of the East India Docks one July morning twenty-five years ago. Even the generally sordid surroundings inseparable from dock-work took on quite a glamour of romantic interest under the genial breath of summer, and airs laden with foreign scents played gently about the surface of the befouled water, or eddied around warehouses, and escaped into the tortuous streets that hemmed in the Docks like a maze. Riggers, stevedores and dock-labourers went about their work with a will under the sweet influence of the unwonted fine weather, and the distant shanty being sung on board of a homeward-bounder about to enter from the river sounded rich, mellow and musical. The whole scene formed a fitting setting for the departure of the *Maiden Queen*, a mighty steel sailing-ship of the highest class, that lay, with all her far-reaching spread of masts and yards in

perfect order, in readiness to be gone. She was indeed a sight to gladden the eyes of a good sailor, and make him forget the tremendous toil necessary for latter day diminished crews in the keeping of such a ship up to that perfection of neatness and readiness for service.

But happily, in the case of the *Maiden Queen*, no such reflections upon hardships consequent on legal undermanning were called for. Chartered by the Queensland Government for the conveyance to that bright land of a great company of prospective wives for settled colonists, she was to carry a double crew of picked men, and her officers felt highly elated at the prospect of being able to handle their ship as she deserved to be handled. They thought, too, with considerable satisfaction of the grand opportunities for flirtation that would naturally present themselves during a three or four months' passage with three hundred and fifty single young women on board, all, be it remembered, making the voyage to the Antipodes with the expressly avowed intention of getting married as soon as possible, and therefore unlikely to be averse to a little preliminary practice with gallants of such proved repute as sailors. There were, however, two or three little hindrances to the carrying out of a pleasant programme, had the officers but realized them. The first was the character of the matron appointed

to take charge of the huge bevy of fair ones ; the second was the grim and saturnine doctor, who in such a ship would be in some respects even more powerful than the captain ; and the third was the presence of the captain's wife, a middle-aged lady, whose one idea was that it was her mission in life to keep a watchful eye upon her husband's behaviour toward the fair sex when she could, and to suspect him of every kind of infidelity towards herself when she could not.

But these matters, being as yet hidden from the knowledge of the officers, troubled them not at all, and their conversation, as they loitered about the resplendent poop of their magnificent ship, was joyous and witty in the extreme, although it must be admitted that most of the fun was enjoyed by the chief and second officers at the expense of the third, a tall, graceful and handsome young fellow of twenty-one, who answered to the name of Sydney Fitzgerald. He was so mightily susceptible to the influence of female society, that it was said of him that he could hardly help turning his head to look after a hen, and that the flutter of a petticoat in the distance stirred his blood and got into his head far quicker than a tumbler of strong wine would have done. With such a delightful prospect as was now before him, Fitz. took all the chaff of his seniors most good-naturedly, keeping at the same time his weather

eye lifting for the appearance of the procession of young ladies at the head of the jetty.

Forward the fine crew, British almost to a man, were discussing more or less soberly the roseate prospects of such a trip as they were now about to begin. Some of the elder ones were silent and distract because there was really nothing to find fault with, and some half-dozen bewailed the waste of time in waiting on board at the quay, time that might have been so much more profitably spent in some near-by pub, getting comfortably drunk and incapable of doing their share of disagreeable work until the vessel was fairly on her way down Channel. But taking the whole ship's company together, from the first mate, in all the glory of his uniform, down to the perspiring cook's mate, in the big galley forward, they were well content at the prospect of as comfortable a voyage as any decent sailor-man could desire.

Suddenly the desultory conversation ceased, so did work along the quays ; for all attention was rivetted upon the spectacle of three hundred and fifty young women, the majority of whom brought with them the very breath of the scented meadows of England, turning the corner of a grey warehouse and heading straight for the *Maiden Queen*. Oh, but it was a goodly gathering. And yet the faces of the officers fell as their gaze became

fixed upon its leader. Tall, angular and erect, with keen black eyes peering sternly forth from a face hard as though chiselled out of grey granite, and every fold of her scanty brown dress betokening rigid resolution, the matron stalked in advance of her charges. Not a giggle escaped her receptive ears, not a roguish glance, even behind her back, but seemed to send a thrill of indignation through her spare frame, and the whole ship's company felt as they gazed upon her, that here, indeed, was a force to be reckoned with seriously, and one that would admit of no trifling whatever with its great responsibilities.

As if to add to the shadows which the vision of this estimable wardress had already cast across the bright horizon of those officers' dreams, came the doctor at a rapid stride from another direction, arriving just in time to scrutinize the embarking of each individual as she ascended the gangway. The only gleam of satisfaction which crossed that worthy's seamed and lowering countenance was when he exchanged glances with the matron. He recognized a kindred spirit, and would, had he been able, have rejoiced. Both of these people had been prison officials, both possessed the highest credentials as to their absolute fitness for the task they had undertaken and their undeviating rectitude, and both were as unpleasant specimens of humanity as any

genial soul could wish not to be associated with.

The last maiden stepped coyly over the rail and disappeared down the companion into the spacious apartment reserved for these emigrants, the doctor and matron, like two surly collies following a flock of sheep, brought up the rear, the captain and pilot suddenly made their appearance on deck from the saloon, and amid the hoarse bawling of orders to "Slack away forward," "Hold on aft," "Go ahead the tug" etc., the *Maiden Queen* glided gently away from her berth towards the Dock gates, placidly commencing her long voyage.

The passage of an outward-bound sailing-ship down the crowded Thames abounds with interest, and might easily be made the subject of a readable article, so little is known about it by land-living people. But as the present story is concerned with matters of more romantic interest, to the general reader, at all events, we will pass rapidly over the *Maiden Queen's* journey down the river, her exchange of pilots and tug-boats, her parting with both these aids to her safe exit from port, and the taking over the navigation of the splendid fabric by her own officers as, with her towering spread of canvas all set, she sped joyously seaward as if glad to be free from the hampering environment of dock and river.

Much to the satisfaction of all hands, north-

easterly winds of eager freshness prevailed, and the ship made grand progress for the first few days, while owing to sea-sickness among the passengers there were no opportunities for the shipmen's minds to be distracted by visions of female loveliness. But the weather continuing fine, before the vessel had been one week at sea little batches of girls made their appearance on deck, most of them interestingly pale from the seclusion below and recent nausea. They were, of course, objects of the utmost solicitude on the part of the crew, or such members thereof who could rig up any sort of an excuse for being on the poop, to which sacred precincts the girls were sternly enjoined to confine themselves. Their presence on deck had, however, at once a marked effect upon the course made by the ship, and reasonably so ; for who could expect a poor helmsman to pay due attention to his steering when from so many corners of the poop he was continually meeting arch smiles and roguish glances. In vain did the captain at intervals rush furiously on deck from watching the tell-tale compass below, and noting that the ship was being sculled along rather than steered. All his scoldings and threatenings had but little effect, and that purely temporary, since the original and powerful cause of the neglect they reprobated still remained. And more reprehensible still,

all three officers were found frequently in the very act of flirtation with members of the fair company, and their breaches of duty, being observed by the lynx-eyed matron or doctor, were, of course, faithfully reported to the captain. He, poor man, although by no means a stern and unbending ruler, had at his elbow a monitor, whose strictness was rigidity itself. Mrs. Hunt, his wife, kept as keen a watch upon the behaviour of the girls as their two legal controllers did, and no infraction of discipline, however slight, escaped her watchful eyes. Nor did she ever fail to impress upon Captain Hunt the enormity of these offences against propriety, or to urge him to impose the severest penalties upon the offenders.

Thus it came to pass that by the time the *Maiden Queen* was sweeping majestically southward through the region of the north-east Trades, matters had reached a very dangerous pitch of discontent. The unsleeping watch maintained by the matron, doctor and Mrs. Hunt over the girls had resulted in the interception of many tender missives on their passage between crew and passengers, of which, it may be remarked in passing, the majority came from the latter. Every one of these earned the hapless passenger concerned in it a week's confinement below, no light punishment in the tropics, while the number of days' pay of which the amorous seamen were

mulcted amounted to a goodly sum. The officers, too, were in a state of permanent disgrace, while meal times in the saloon were more like penitential ceremonies than anything else from the silence and gloom with which they were always accompanied. More, not only were the officers in bad odour with the skipper, his wife, and the doctor ; they were jealous of one another, Fitz. especially being more like some impotent pacha, the inmates of whose seraglio were all engaged in flirtation before his eyes, than an energetic young merchant officer with a career before him to make or mar.

Matters culminated at last in dramatic fashion. The ship had reached the calm belt between the Trade winds near the Line, and was encountering the usual detestable weather there prevalent. Tremendous thunderstorms, deluges of rain, fitful airs of wind several times round the compass in an hour, all these combined to make the crew's life a burden to them. But apparently they were finding a mysterious solace in the clandestine correspondence carried on with the passengers, for there was an utter absence of the usual muttered growls heard at frequent intervals during the night, when the constantly recurring orders of "Lee fore brace" or "Weather main brace" were heard ringing fore and aft. The explanation of their amiability came suddenly. Fitz.,

the third mate, caught sight of a seaman climbing inboard from the mizen chains during the trimming of the main yards one morning watch, from 4 to 8 ; jealous and all his suspicions aroused, he seized the man, fiercely demanding the reason of his being over the side. Instead of answering, the man endeavoured to wrench himself away from the officer's grip. In the struggle the breast of his jumper was torn open, and out fell a perfect budget of notes, which he had been collecting at one of the portholes, and would doubtless have distributed as soon as the watch had been dismissed.

As the letters fell a vivid glare of lightning lit up the scene, and, dropping the braces, the watch rushed to the spot. There was a wild scramble, and a good deal of noise, during which the companion leading to the passengers' quarters suddenly burst open and a stream of girls poured forth on to the poop. Most of them were fully dressed in the sensible serviceable garments provided by the agents, which looked as if the present movement had been premeditated. In two minutes all hands were on deck with one exception, the matron, whose strident entreaties to be let loose dominated every other sound.

The scuffle was brief but energetic. In ten minutes the control of the ship had passed into the hands of the passengers and the fellows before

the mast, who were all frantic with excitement, while the captain, doctor, officers and petty officers were prisoners, locked in various state rooms under guard of divers buxom damsels who, while full of importance at being thus posted, seemed by their boisterous mirth to look upon the whole affair as a gigantic joke. But as in all similar upheavals, the emergency had produced the necessary leaders, and a tall, splendidly proportioned young Scotchwoman, by virtue of her commanding personality, was unanimously elected head of affairs, and dubbed Captain Jenny on the spot. Sizing up the situation with marvellous celerity, she appointed Pat Mahony, a fine specimen of an Irish seaman, as her first mate, telling him in a confidential whisper that she had fixed upon him as her future husband when coming a-board in London. To him she delegated the task of appointing his officers from among the crowd, and in order that there should be no delay in this necessary operation directed him to proceed at once by mustering all hands.

What a unique scene it was, to be sure. The weather had cleared, and the purple placid sea was just receiving the first tender suggestions of colour from the high dawn. The stately ship just moved stealthily from side to side, a motion insufficient to disturb the foothold of even the least experienced seafarer on those warm wet

decks. An elderly Englishman, his tender susceptibilities unabated by his many years of hardship, lolled easefully on the grating by the useless wheel. Even the thickly clustering groups of girls hushed their giggling at the solemn splendour of the sunrise, and the mutinous seamen shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, as if undergoing a mental conflict anent the possibilities of this serious prank of theirs. Then the voice of Captain Jenny rang out loud and clear, breaking the silken silence with disconcerting abruptness.

"Boys an' girls," she said, "we've shaken aff th' yoke of th' tyrants that's been oppressin' huz ever sin' we ben aboard. A little kindness an' forbearance micht ha' prevented a' this, but we couldna get ut. An' noo we're juist gaun t' hannel thon ship weersells, an' kip they vratches as they've kept huz until we get somewhere wheer we can let 'em go an' clear oot t' reap th' reward o' ween enterprise. In orrder to dae this successfully we must hae laws an' behave weersells. You've eleckit me capten. Weel, capten Ah'll be, an' the first order Ah'm givin' is that a' things must be conduckit decently. We'el hae nae scandal. Juist an occasional kiss, in public, ye mind, an' free conversashin when worrk's nae goin' on, bit that's a'. Noo a' ye hizzies min' what Ah say, or ye'll fin' me worse than yon auld limmer 'at's receivin' th' due reward o' her deeds doon

below the noo. Ma' promust husban' 'll noo address th' meetin'."

So saying, she stepped back and pushed Pat forward. He looked ill at ease, and well he might, for the matrimonial intentions of Jenny were not at all to his mind. His fancy was for a dear little plump body with a musical South Irish accent, Norah Sullivan by name ; and he foresaw a stupendous difficulty in the way of his winning her with that masterful Scotchwoman in charge. So with a mental summoning of all his reserves he cleared his throat, and, to the utter amazement of everybody, but the secret relief of many, he said,—

“Bhoys an young laadies, it's my opinyon 'at we've a-ben too haasty altogithir. This young lady here's ben mag—magniminoos enough to make me chief mate, which is playin' a low-down joke on a mahn that can't add 2 an 2 togither ner give an' orrdher to save his life. I've ben doin' some stiff thinkin' (for me) dhurin' th' las' few minyits, an' I feel that th' best thing t' dew's to put things back as we found 'em. I don't mind ownin' 'at I've ben a big fool, an I don't want t' be no bigger wan than I am.”

There was a breathless pause. Then that fiery Scotchwoman sprang forward, and seizing the recalcitrant Pat by the shoulders she poured forth a flood of burning words. Eloquent she

was, with an eloquence wonderful to hear. But persuade she could not. The reaction had come. All were afraid of the part they had taken in the mutiny. None could foresee what the end of the foolish business would be, and she could note from the bewildered expressions on the faces of the majority that the game was up. It was a bitter awakening from her dream, which had developed like Jonah's gourd into a brilliant prospect of founding a new settlement somewhere (that was only a detail), wherein all the members should be married and equal, and where individuality of enterprise and energy should have its fullest scope. And now her great scheme had burst like a bubble, because of the cowardice of those whom she had depended upon. Her overwrought feelings asserted themselves in truly feminine fashion, and she sank to the deck in a dead faint.

This became the signal for action. While several girls flew towards their late chief to perform those kindly offices which a fainting female imperiously demands from her own sex, the sailors, led by Pat, hastened to undo as far as they could the mischief already consummated. The officers were released with many apologies for what had happened, and sheepishly enough, as might be expected from men who had been caught napping in so disgraceful a manner, they

resumed control of the ship. Some feeble attempts were made by the men to secure terms for themselves while restoring to the captain and doctor their liberty, but those two gentlemen were so crestfallen and ashamed that they could hardly speak. As soon, however, as the ship had resumed her normal aspect, a deputation of twelve of the girls, headed by Jenny, made their appearance at the captain's door, demanding, in anything but a humble way, an interview with him and the doctor. Upon the two officers appearing, Jenny informed them that the majority of the girls having agreed upon a course of action, they had deputed her to approach the captain and apologize for the shock their behaviour must have given him ; but that they were fully determined to teach the doctor and matron, especially the matron, a life-long lesson at any cost to themselves unless their treatment was entirely altered for the better. They promised not to offend any more in frivolous matters, such as sly love-making, letter writing, etc.; but that at the first appearance of tyranny on the part of the matron or doctor, they would take the administration of justice into their own hands, and beat those two officials within an inch of their lives. No answer was given, and the deputation departed triumphantly, having, as they felt, secured their immunity from reprisals, at least while on board the ship.

For a week work went on as usual, except that there was a general sense of trouble impending—a feeling among all the foremast hands that some scheme of retribution was maturing against them, which should be as sudden in its execution as it would be complete in its solace to the wounded feelings of the afterguard. Meanwhile the *Maiden Queen* crept slowly down through the western fringe of the south-east Trades until she reached the latitude of Cape Frio and lay in the variables there, awaiting the coming of the brave west wind that would send her flying along through the roaring forties towards Australia.

While thus compulsorily idle, a howling squall of almost hurricane violence burst upon her, hurling her over on her beam-ends, for she had nearly everything set at the time. The three mighty steel masts, stayed into the fabric of the ship until they were like an integral part of the hull, refused to give way in any detail, and their enormous leverage prevented any possibility of her righting herself unless they were got rid of. In olden days such a catastrophe would have been met by a few quick axe-strokes upon lanyard and shroud stretched to their utmost tension to windward, and with the parting of those great holding ropes the masts would at once break off and disappear, allowing the overburdened ship

to right herself. But such a proceeding was impossible here. The separation of those massive steel bars bolted into the ship's plates would have been a long heavy task had she been upright, now when the deck was perpendicular as a wall it was not to be thought of. And as the invading sea reached the passengers' quarters where, amid heaps of débris piled up on the lee side, the hapless girls were huddled, their piteous cries for help needed instant attention. The danger of their being drowned down there like rats in a trap was terribly pressing, and all hands, leaving everything else, laboured like men fighting for their own lives to release them. The magnitude of their task must be left to the imagination, yet owing to the fining of the weather it was not nearly as difficult as, with a gale of wind blowing and a heavy sea rising, it would have been. Two hours of superhuman toil saw the weather topsides of the *Maiden Queen* covered with a draggled clinging crowd of women-folk, called at a moment's notice to confront one of the most awful sea-conditions imaginable, yet without a single exception bearing their stupendous trial with the utmost courage. And the most conspicuous instance of self-command as well as self-forgetfulness was the cross-grained old matron, who in that dread hour bore herself like a veritable heroine of romance, so that her grim visage

became glorified in the eyes of those who not so long before were ready to inflict any punishment upon her that lay in their power.

A miserable night and day were spent perched in that precarious position on the port topsides of the now derelict ship, while the crew, as opportunity offered, toiled slavishly to free the boats to windward and get them safely eased down into the water. But it was a hopeless task from the beginning. One by one each gleam of hope died away, and a dull acquiescence in the inevitable gradually seized upon the helpless ones. Then, when hope had almost fled, there appeared a delivering angel in the shape of an English cruiser engaged upon some special service. Her gallant bluejackets, delighted beyond measure at this unique opportunity for exhibiting their prowess, came and went between the two vessels with marvellous celerity until every soul was rescued. And just as the last boat-load was being transported across the bright waves towards the saving ship, the poor *Maiden Queen* gave a convulsive heave or two and disappeared.

The rest of the story is hardly worth telling, it was all so peaceful, comfortable and commonplace ; from the landing of the saved ones in Buenos Ayres and their subsequent passage to Brisbane in a fine steamer specially chartered for the purpose, to their landing in that handsome

city, they had not one adventure worth recording. And never a word was mentioned in any legal document about the Mutiny of the *Maiden Queen*.

XXI

The Luck of the Doctor

THE *Arion*, four-poster, was as grand a wind-jammer as ever sailed out of Liverpool. Sort of craft a good sailor-man likes the look of, you know, even if he does see that she's going to be no *Sunbeam* for him, with three men to do every man's work, but the proportions exactly reversed. For she had just been bought by a firm whose designation I will not hint at, except by saying that they lived up to their reputation of being the meanest in Great Britain, which means a great deal, without any pun.

They got a fine charter for her—Melbourne with general cargo, and a new lot of officers at little more than half what her former owners had been paying, and also, since such people always seems to have the devil's luck and their own too, got forty first-class passengers, invalids ordered a long sea voyage, at fares of £45 apiece. And this is where the doctor comes in.

Have you never known a man so smart and

intelligent that he not only absorbs knowledge as a sponge does water, but puts his knowledge into practice before most men would have realized that they really knew. If you have, you will also have noticed that such men are usually the world's Cinderellas, always helping somebody out of a hole and getting left, or else magnanimously refusing to be rewarded for services, most valuable services too, which the recipient is making a jolly good thing out of, to speak somewhat vulgarly. That was the kind of football of fate that Dr. Fred. Norie was. He earned prizes at school, and got disqualified for helping his chums illegitimately : his father died while he was at University College and left him almost to his own resources ; but his fine pluck and ability, as well as his temperate habits, carried him triumphantly through. He bought a half share in a practice in Manchester, only to be flung out of his trap two days after taking hold, getting run over and so badly hurt that by the time he was well again the little money that his partner handed over to him to relinquish his share had nearly gone.

Then he saw the advertisement for a fully-qualified medical man put in by the owners of the *Arion*, and that same afternoon appeared at their offices to apply for the post. They most generously offered him £4 a month outward, and

if no passengers were secured for the return passage he might come home free of charge or stay in Australia, whichever suited him best. He accepted, saying politely grateful words which his somewhat sardonic grin hardly corroborated. The senior hastened to add that as invalids on a health voyage were proverbially liberal in their treatment of the doctor who attended them, it was not customary to give doctors going such a voyage any salary, it being esteemed a wonderful opportunity for a young man with his name to make. But they, the firm, always preferred to err on the side of liberality, and, therefore, etc., etc. Norie merely bowed ; he could not trust himself to speak, as he had six chums in similar positions, and was, therefore, pretty well posted as to who was on the weather side this tack.

But having made his bargain, like the good chap he was, he started in to fulfil his position to the best of his ability. The *Arion* was not sailing for a week, but he went straight on board and obtained permission to rig up his berth and occupy it, spending nearly all his time on board getting familiar with the hang of things in general, and also making the intimate acquaintance of the three mates, the skipper, and the apprentices, eight of the latter, six of whom had been in the ship before, some for three years. And conse-

quently, with his wonderful aptitude for acquiring a working acquaintance with things, by the time the tug-boat was ready to hook on outside the Bramley Moore Dock, Doctor Norie might safely have been accounted, apart from his medical skill, as a fairly useful member of the ship's company. On his part, he was fairly alive with perceptivity. He had quite appreciated, for instance, the appalling fact that the sixteen wasters, who lurched aboard this 2,000 ton register ship at the last moment, were numerically much too weak to handle her, even if each of them had been the *fine fleur* of a sailor-man. Being as they were, not sailors at all, but a crowd of sea labourers, and not enamoured of labour either, he saw that if there came a tight corner in their way, those clean British-bred boys, the officers, and himself would have every ounce of their national characteristics of stickability and adaptability tested to its last corpuscle. And he smiled a bright comprehensive smile.

The time was mid-September, and the year was just such another as this, when the seasons seemed to be turned topside behind. Therefore the *Arion* was towed out past the Formby into a fresh south-easterly gale with her long jibboom to get rigged out, the loose ends left by the riggers to be attended to, and the pleasant prospect of forereaching under four close reefed topsails all

night in the fairway of the Channel, for, of course, Messrs. — & Co. couldn't afford a tow farther than Point Lynas. Towing to the Tuskar was an unheard-of extravagance. So what with comforting sea-sick passengers when the gigantic Jolliffe tug dragged her cumbrous tow across three seas at once, and plunging on deck every little while to lend a hand on this rope or that, and infect everybody with whom he came in contact with his own indomitable cheerfulness of spirit, Dr. Norie was fully occupied. Sailors will know well that I do not at all exaggerate when I say that half the credit of boring the *Arion* out of the Channel at all was due to Dr. Norie. In that abominable four days he established himself in the hearts of everybody on board as the man whom nothing could upset, a sort of sublime Mark Tapley, and withal as unconscious of doing anything extraordinary as a babe.

But the *Arion* was an unfortunate ship that trip, a perfect Jonah among vessels. The master had been, nay was, a good seaman, but he had been ashore for over a year, watching with an aching heart his little savings melting away, and now that he had got a ship he felt the effects of that long spell of anxious idleness. He stuck to his post through the succession of gales that buffeted the ship end-on, until poor human nature could no longer hold out, and he had perforce

to take to his cot. Then Norie tended him like a mother, spent all his spare time with him, and to get his mind easy talked of seamanship and navigation. So the doctor's education progressed, none the less rapidly because unconsciously. If he had a smoke with an officer at night and a shift of wind came, be sure he knew why the yards were trimmed this way or that, why the lee side of a sail, excepting the lower top-sails, was always clewed up first, and what would happen if you let go the tack of a course in a heavy wind, and why the bobstays were the strongest part of a ship's gear.

With all these educational processes at work in his seething brain, Norie found little time for dalliance, but he could not help becoming aware presently that one of his patients, a beautiful girl of twenty-two, regarded him with that soft, humid, luminous gaze that one usually sees in the eyes of the young mother as she bends over her first-born. When he first noticed it, the rate of his heart beats was accelerated full ten per cent., but his multifarious interests soon brought his pulse down again to the normal. Still, he found time to keep a very careful watch upon her health, and to feel hopeful that the family physician had been mistaken in his diagnosis of her case. That it was not consumption at all, but something which he might be able to cure.

Meanwhile the weather did not improve in the least. The winds all seemed to have entered into a terrible compact to prevent sailing vessels getting south, and the long days and nights of "batter-fanging" about were playing fierce havoc with the badly-nourished, badly-lodged crew, whose poor physique was not in any case adapted to bear much hardship. Dr. Norie's careful supervision was mainly instrumental in keeping the boys off the sick list, and his cheery confidence in them stirred up that high spirit of emulation which most British boys have, if only it be fostered by any encouragement at all. As for the three gallant young officers, their exertions were almost superhuman, but each of them unconsciously clung to Norie, and felt that half an hour in his society just for a smoke and a yarn was a tonic incomparable in its effect upon the mind, and, therefore, on the body. Then came a calamity with hideous suddenness which bade fair to end the passage. The gales they had beaten against for nearly three weeks culminated when they were off the Azores in what sailors are fond of calling the "tail-end" of a hurricane, when only the tiniest rag of canvas can be shown (in this case a tarpaulin in the mizen rigging) just to keep her from falling off into the trough of the sea and rolling her upper spars out of her. While in this helpless condition a huge wave, due doubtless to some sub-

marine volcanic convulsion, came sweeping upon them, reaching from horizon to horizon. It took her in its stride just at watch changing, midnight, and when it had passed only those parts of the deck which were built into her structure remained. At the roll-call it was found that four seamen and the first and second mates were gone, four more seamen had broken legs or arms, and upon Norie conveying the terrible news to the sick captain, he bowed his head and gave up the ghost.

Then, as if satisfied with the damage done, the weather fined down, and the wind came out strongly from the north and east as if the Trades were anxious to make up for lost time. Norie and the third mate, who held a chief's ticket, held a brief consultation and decided that it was safer to go on than to try and beat back ; only fine weather they felt could save them now, and that they were quite unlikely to find going homeward. So they got sail on her, all hands that were left working manfully, until by 10 a.m. they had every rag set and the ship bowling southward at a good twelve knots an hour.

But now it needed all the physical and mental firmness possessed by these two young men to hold out against the pleadings of some of the passengers, and the threats and growlings of the crew, who wanted to give it up and go back. The boys, however, even to the newest arrival,

ranged themselves on the side of the afterguard, and after a few days' careful watching and a feeling of strained relations all round, matters settled down, the fineness of the weather and steadiness of the wind largely contributing to this desirable end. To the intense amazement of the crew, Dr. Norie took his watch like an old salt, Mr. Thurston, the third, sleeping in the chart-room ready for a call if any difficulty presented itself. By dint of the most careful regulation of his time and leaving the deck in charge of one of the elder apprentices when there was no immediate necessity for his being there, he managed to attend to his medical duties, so well too that his patients began to look upon him as miraculously gifted with healing powers. And Miss Everett, the young lady before-mentioned, being wonderfully improved in health, was, as he said, his right hand in the medical department, doing many small irksome duties which he was able to delegate to her, as well as he could do them himself. So they worked together like chums, but had little time for love-making as yet.

So well did the Trades favour them that they crossed the Line after all in twenty-nine days, and without meeting any doldrums at all, took the south-east Trades in 2° south, finding them too fairly strong and hanging well to the Eastward. Away they went, heading as high as SSW. at a

good ten knots, and everybody on board was in good humour, forgetting the ordeal of the "roaring forties" which lay before them.

It should be noted in passing that the doctor had insisted upon the men being better fed out of the excess stores put on board for the passengers, and also that no work should be done that might safely be left undone.

And in those halcyon days, gliding down to the parallel of Monte Video, the doctor learned so much navigation, having a natural bent for mathematics, that, as he laughingly said, he felt almost competent to command a ship. His words had a prophetic ring about them, for when they reached the meridian of 40° east on their great stretch down to Australasia, he *was* suddenly called upon to take command. Mr. Thurston, whose watch it was, suddenly stepped over to the lee side of the poop to do something, when a man doing a little job in the lee lower jigger rigging, dropped his marlinespike, which fell flat upon the officer's head, knocking him insensible. Dr. Norie, hastily called to him, looked grave as he pronounced it severe concussion of the brain, which might result fatally within the next twenty-four hours or take months to cure.

Now the brave doctor was in charge indeed, and that, too, on one of the stormiest stretches of sea in the whole world. Yet by this time all

hands had such confidence in him, and, better still, he had such confidence in himself, that there was no lowering of his high spirits or look of anxiety upon his cheerful face. He chose the oldest apprentice as his coadjutor in watch keeping, a young man nearly out of his time, and bade him use the drilling he had been getting for the last six weeks now, and above all not to be frightened to act. So the good ship sped on towards her destination with undiminished speed, nay, with accelerated speed, for Norie, having made careful calculations of strains, had come to the conclusion that he might safely "crack on" as he had been wont to do in one of his friend's yachts during his studentship. Thenceforward to Cape Otway an average speed of 320 miles a day was maintained, and when, to the almost delirious delight of everybody, the pilot came aboard at Queenscliff, the *Arion*, in spite of all her troubles, had made a passage of eighty-eight days from Liverpool—the best of the year for sailing-ships.

She anchored off Williamstown, and the doctor went ashore to report, creating a scene on his departure that almost bowled him over, as he said. When he returned with another doctor to give an opinion upon poor Thurston's condition, he was somewhat annoyed to find that the reporters had been off and obtained material from the boys for a flamboyant yarn, but his vexa-

tion passed like a breath when he found that Thurston had taken a turn, and was rapidly on the mend. Now comes the incredible part of my story. A cablegram from the owners was received the next day, censuring the doctor and the sick officer for not putting into the Azores and awaiting instructions, informing the former that according to his agreement, there being no passengers, his engagement had terminated, and desiring the agents to pay him off.

He received this extraordinary news with a hearty laugh, and then, according to promise, went to the hotel, where his late patients, all wonderfully improved with their passage, were awaiting his company to a farewell dinner. He was met in the lobby by Miss Everett, to whom he told his strange news. "What will you do now, doctor?" said she. "Look around for another job as quickly as possible," he replied with a small shrug and thrusting his hands a little deeper into his badly furnished pockets. With a tremor in her voice she said: "There's a job you might feel inclined to take, doctor, and one that would pay you better than the last." "What's that?" he asked with eagerness. "Marry me," she whispered. "Oh!" he replied, with a high colour, "I'd have liked that fine if I hadn't been a beggar, but I couldn't ask you to share my empty pocket and my rotten luck." "No," she replied,

with a bright smile, "you won't either. I asked you because I knew that there's a thousand pounds waiting for you in the next room that we have put up for you, and I can bring you a *dot* of another thousand." "It's a bargain," he cried, seizing both her hands and appropriating his first kiss. And they went in to dinner.

But it was not until after the wedding that he discovered that she had a thousand a year of her own, and, better still, decided that his luck had finally turned.

XXII

Poetry of the Sea

IN precisely the same way, I suppose, as the best journalists—i.e. those who give the most vivid impressions of what they have seen to their readers—are men who have apparently devoted a wonderfully short space of time to their observations, so it would seem that for the writing of real sea poetry an extended acquaintance with maritime conditions is not merely unnecessary but hampering. I come to this conclusion reluctantly but inevitably, for in common with all reading seafarers I have noticed that we may look in vain for sea poetry from sailors. Sailors have written verse, Falconer's "Shipwreck" to wit, but between that peculiar poem and the marvellous majesty, profound insight, and truly amazing knowledge of deep-sea secrets exhibited in the "Ancient Mariner" how great a gulf is fixed!

"Only those who brave its dangers comprehend its mystery" rings true, and yet it is no less true that Longfellow, very little more of a sailor than Coleridge, has also interpreted the mystery of the

mighty ocean in a manner (most sailors think) only second in true poetic power to that of Coleridge. To the well-read sailor—and there are far more of him than one would imagine remembering the poverty of his literary output—Coleridge always stands easily highest, Longfellow next, and Byron next as the interpreters of the voices of the sea. The Biblical allusions to the sea in the Old Testament (always in terms of poetry, be it remembered, the inspired writers seeming only able to express themselves rhythmically about the sea) stand on a plane of their own. Their truth, their stupendous power is felt, as the voices of the sea are felt, rather than heard ; but it is only seldom that the sailor obtains any enjoyment from them. They are overwhelming. Something of sacrilege seems involved in the attempt to enjoy them as literature, and also, although I have only twice or thrice heard this mooted, there certainly is a feeling that, grand as the passages are, they have lost immeasurably by translation ; that could they but be read, with full comprehension, in the original, their splendour would be beyond all ordinary thought.

But to return for a moment to the idea in the first paragraph of this article. Is not this clogging of the poetic foot, this hopeless congestion of the mental faculties forbidding their expressing what they feel, rather the rule than the exception

everywhere, and not merely at sea ? Is the spectacle of the man who knows too much and is consequently unable to make profitable use of his knowledge a rare one ? I think not, and yet how sad a sight it is. The faculty of clear expression of thought seems to be one of the rarest, even in prose. Perhaps that is why, as if in despair, certain writers who revel in obscurity, whose meaning or meanings (for there are usually several alternatives) are apparently hidden from even themselves, are elevated to such an exalted plane by critics of eminence. These gentlemen, finding doubtless a mental intellectual exercise of the highest stimulating properties in elucidating the dark sayings of their favourites, proclaim aloud to a wondering world that in these literary mazes are alone to be found the true prophetic and informing messages for mankind.

And yet all the great masterpieces of prose and poetry are distinguished by clarity of expression, simplicity of diction. That is, if by masterpieces we understand those works that have gone down deepest into the hearts of the greatest multitude of people. Fords that a babe can wade, depths in which a mammoth may disport himself, are these massive works of the giants of literature. In them the sailor luxuriates, pointing their beauties out to his shipmates in quaint language, and bewailing his inability to go and deal like-

wise with the glories amidst which he lives and moves and has his being.

There is one poet, however, over whose claim to the proud title there is much controversy among experts, who does certainly come nearer to satisfying the primitive needs of the sailor in the matter of adequate sea-expression than either of the three first mentioned. And yet he is placed in a class by himself—he does not appear to claim precedence to the sailor's mind among other poets. Really, I think that sailors are apt to claim Rudyard Kipling as one of themselves—I know for a fact that any sailor five minutes in his company will find his tongue wagging freely in familiar nautical jargon, and will never dream of stopping to explain. Yet Kipling is no seaman. He has never spent the long, long hours of the night watches on board of a sailing-ship in a stark calm, or, with all sail furled but the barest scrap of canvas, in the grip of a howling gale, far out of the track of most shipping. And this not for one or two days but for all the best years of a man's life. So that occasionally even he makes mistakes, detected at once by the keen sensitiveness of the sailor, but looked upon most indulgently in his case, because of the general accuracy of his knowledge and the intense sympathy with his subject manifested in all he does. That savage, brutal energy so apparent in his verse appeals power-

fully to the sailor. It is of the sea, it rings true, as truly as does his much maligned rhyme of the engine-room to the practical, inaudible engineer.

But some may ask, "What about ballad poetry? Do not the stirring lyrics of Dibdin, Russell, Alan Cunningham, and Barry Cornwall appeal to the sailor? Did not the first named touch the sailor's heart in the days when a British Government found it worth their while to subsidize him for the way in which his stirring songs brought men into the Navy?" The best answer to that must be found in the fact that, whether you go into the forecastle of a merchantman or on to the lower deck of a man-of-war when singing is going on, the songs that you will never hear are the old sea songs. Why is this? Because the sailor, being intensely critical of everything he reads, cannot away with the false fustian, the utterly unseamanlike jargon that these songs contain, and turns for relief to the latest music-hall inanity, which amuses him, at any rate.

High appreciation of the splendid deeds of a bygone day such as that of Mr. Henry Newbolt's "Admirals All," massive, spirit-stirring, and historically true, can and does appeal to the men in the Navy; but, after all, these fine poems deal with the warlike doings of men almost exclusively, and only by the subtlest of touches is the wide salt atmosphere of the ancient yet ever youthful

sea conveyed. Over the heads of the hardly bestead merchant seamen these poems glide forcelessly. A rugged chanty like the "Ballad of the Bolivar," with all its merciless over-emphasis, its savagery, its Berserker bitterness, finds their hearts' core at once. Reading it or hearing it, they feel the brine scorching their sea-split hands and feet, they hear the hiss of the curling wave-summit as it threatens to overwhelm their ungainly craft, the broken groans of the tortured engines beneath their feet grind upon their soul-strings, and they see reflected in each other's faces the fundamental fact of the imminence of death.

Therefore it is that in considering sea-poetry I would unhesitatingly give the pre-eminent position to such men as can by their primitive, rugged words, full of the elemental power that is characteristic of the ocean, strike most directly at the sailor's heart. What does it matter if occasionally there be on the sensitive ear of the highly educated critic a jarring note? May it not be that he whose life is being passed in the careful balancing of measured language, who has all the literary artist's delight in the coruscations of faceted words, may not understand the need there is for direct, primal, forceful expression of so mighty a chorus of voices as those of the immemorial sea? The sailor feels always, al-

though in almost every case he lacks utterly the ability to interpret his feelings by the spoken word, that the strong wine of his life is apt to lose its headiness, its savour, when presented in a chased and jewelled goblet whose very glitter makes him fear to take it in hand ; feels, too, if I may use a coarse simile, very much like the dog in the manger, because he himself cannot deliver his soul of its depth of experimental knowledge, because, while the innermost chords of his being vibrate fiercely as the song of the sea sweeps against them, he has no power to tune them so that those who are without shall be able to hear and understand ; therefore no mere *dilettante* landsmen, no petty amateur looking upon the sea from the comfortable height of the promenade deck, ought to be credited with the ability to interpret those sensations which the sailor has insensibly grown to regard as almost too sacred for expression.

The time is fully ripe for the advent of the sailor poet and the marine engineer poet. Whether they write in terms of rhyme or no I care not. A virgin field awaits them, a noble inheritance maturing for ages. They can, if they come, utterly refute the false and foolish prattle of the armchair philosophers, and prove triumphantly that, so far from the romance and poetry of the sea being dead, it has hardly yet been given any adequate expression whatever.



XXIII

Trawl Fishing

WHEN, with a delightful sense of sheltered comfort, heightened to its last expression by a certain shuddering shrinking of the flesh, we hear the roaring of the storm fiend around our cosy habitations, I wonder how many of us think of those isolated toilers who are busy wresting from the tormented deep the materials for the comfortable meal to which we shall presently rise ?

Perhaps the most wonderful of all the ways in which our daily fish is dragged from the beneficent sea is "trawling." Time was, and that not so very long ago, when the pursuit of this most dangerous calling bred up some of our finest seamen —rough diamonds, indeed, but splendid whichever way you considered them and their labours.

They sailed in fleets under the leadership of some veteran of ripe experience, and the way in which under his orders the "mosquito" squadron, as sailors term the fishing fleet, was manipulated, was a sight never to be forgotten. It recalled the

days of ancient sea warfare, when the fleets were handled by means of sail alone, calling forth the highest qualities of seamanship, as well as the prime virtue of courage.

But not only had the commodore of the fishing fleet to be a seaman to his finger tips, but he must pre-eminently be a fisherman, since that was his *raison d'être*; such a fisherman, that he could tell by the signs above as well as those beneath where in all that mobile pasture a harvest might be found, where upon those mysterious plateaux their still more mysterious denizens might, in obedience to who knows what wonderful impulses, be gathered together so that the great purse-like net, stretched wide on its beam, might be let down among them and, dragging along the uneven bottom, scoop them into the narrow-necked recess at its end, from which they could emerge nevermore until turned out on deck.

It hardly needs much explanation, I suppose, to point out how, when the trawls of the fleet were down, and the great hawsers which, bridled to the beams, dragged the nets along the bottom, the handling of the fleet became really a matter calling for great skill in directing, and hardly less ability allied to the promptest obedience in obeying.

Nor does it seem hard to understand how a trawling fleet at its work is so absolutely helpless,

in case some ignorant or careless merchantman should come blundering along.

Dangers of storm, of fog, of collision with one another they were always prepared to meet ; but dangers from fools at sea were the worst and the hardest to bear. However, the old sailing trawler, not quite extinct even now, did bear them and did manage to live in spite of all his hindrances, and become as fine a man generally as you would care to meet.

Then came steam and made a tremendous change. It was so much easier to handle your ship under steam, and during calms, when the old sailing craft was 'perforce idle, the steam trawler was able to reap a splendid harvest.

But still, as of old, with trawls down, unless they were prepared to suffer greater loss than ever, they were at the mercy of any blundering fool who chose to run into them on a dark night, disregarding their multitudinous signals.

There is really no excuse for any seaman mistaking a fleet of trawlers. They carry so many lights, and those of a perfectly well understood character, that the sea is quite illuminated, except, of course, during a thick fog, which will always remain the sailor's worst enemy at sea in narrow waters.

But since men must live, fishing goes on in all weathers, and I well remember how, not long ago,

coming down the North Sea in the middle of winter, I watched them at their wonderful work.

It had been what sailors call with emphasis a "dirty night," no great force of wind, but alternating patches of fog and drizzle, and, besides, it was blisteringly cold. Plunging along through that cheerless dawn we heard suddenly a feeble "toot, toot," and in a minute afterwards, emerging from a fog bank, found ourselves in the midst of a little group of sailing trawlers with nets down.

They looked so helpless and so lonely upon that grey, tumbling expanse, each vessel straining at her trawl as if in mute protest at the hard fate that held her thus and did not permit her to exercise her powers of defence against the waves.

And the men, those wistful figures scattered about the decks, wondering, not whether they would presently be run down or swamped by a tempest, but of how, far beneath them, the trawl might be filling.

A little later we came upon a steam trawling fleet. The sea had risen and was really ugly; but between the fishing vessels and the steam carrier that snatches up the catch and takes it to the nearest port at home, whence it is swiftly conveyed to the thousands of waiting mouths, there were plying dozens of tiny boats, each laden with boxes of fish.

And all around the carrier there was a host,



Coming down the North Sea in the middle of winter, I watched them at their wonderful work—p. 252.

every man of them in imminent deadly peril to life and limb, hurling boxes of fish at the steamer, apparently in entire recklessness as to what became of them.

It was indeed a picture of toil such as I have never seen surpassed, for anon the ship would rise high upon a sea and appear as if about to overwhelm her pigmy attendants, then in a moment she seemed buried in a sea-trough and the waves were about to hurl all the little boats in a broken battered heap upon her deck.

They were all working so hard, were all in such danger, and all for the comfort of such as I, unthinking ones.



XXIV

The Story of a Piece of Whalebone FOR CHILDREN

MISS DOROTHY CLARKE, aged eight, usually known as Dolly, was tired of play. She sat in the nursery looking sad, as if mamma and dada and nurse had left her for always, and so she would never be happy any more. Jack had grown up and gone to school, Baby Phil was too young to be company, and besides, he had gone to by-bye. Mamma and dada had gone out for the evening, and nurse, dear faithful loving nursie, had gone down for her tea, having left Miss Dolly as she thought quite happy with six of her namesakes, a large house for them with lots of beautiful furniture in it, and a kitchen range upon which it was quite easy to make believe you were a great cook serving up the most splendid dinners. But suddenly there came to Dolly a feeling that often comes to grown-up people, a feeling that the things we wanted so badly once, and have now got, have lost the power to amuse us or give us happiness, and what is worse, we cannot think

of anything that would do so, if we try ever so hard. So that Dolly just settled herself down to enjoy a fit of the doleful dumps, and her bright eyes (she really wasn't a bit sleepy) filled with tender tears of pity for herself. She did not dream of calling for nurse or making a fuss, because, being really a sweet good-hearted little lady, she felt that nurse ought to have just a little time to herself out of the long long day she so cheerfully gave to Dolly and baby.

And as Dolly sat thus with her poor forgotten dollies lying neglected around her, and the bright tear-drops just beginning to run over the edges of her eyes, she suddenly saw, through her tears, a piece of black stuff, like a narrow thin strip of wood, lying at her feet. (Of course, she was sitting on the floor.) Without thinking what she was doing she picked it up, and began idly bending it backwards and forwards until, in spite of her intention to be pleasantly miserable for a little while, she became interested to see how it always came back to its shape again and would not break. She had a dim idea that she had seen something like it before, but could not be sure, and so presently (Dolly had a pretty little habit of thinking aloud) she said, "I wonder whatever it is ? It isn't wood, for it doesn't break ; it isn't cane, for it's black ; oh, it is funny stuff !" And then a very strange thing happened. The little black

strip began to quiver in her fingers, though she was then holding it quite still, and a clear sweet little voice said, "Dear little Miss Dolly, if you like I'll tell you my story." And being a very good and polite child she said, "Thank you very much. I should so like to hear it. I love to hear stories—if they are interesting."

The curious thing that this piece of stuff should talk did not trouble her, because she had always talked to her dollies, knowing well that they were made of wood or wax or leather or rags, and imagined them as understanding her, and talking back most pleasantly for an hour at a time. So she listened very politely to the clear little voice, watching the piece of black bendy stuff with wide open eyes that seemed to see all it was telling her, and losing herself entirely in the wonder of the story.

"I am a piece of what people call whalebone, but why I am sure I cannot tell, for even you, my dear little lady, who know nothing at all about me, would never have thought of me as a piece of bone. In fact—you won't mind me mentioning it, I'm sure—I am one of the most wonderful substances grown in any animal and I come from one of the most wonderful animals, and am used in the most wonderful way by that animal. Not that I am at all stuck up about it, but I like to know it myself, and to tell other people about it, who

don't know. Now I must begin at the beginning, or else I shall have to go back every now and then just as you have to do when in reading a book you skip, and then presently you think the book is stupid and doesn't tell the story properly, when it's all your own fault.

" Long, long ago, so long that there were no books written then, all creatures were very different to what they are now. And some of them were very curious creatures indeed, although it is certain that they were just properly made by God to lead their lives in the old and different world. In the course of time as the world altered the animals altered so as to keep their places in it, and one of the strangest alterations was that made in himself by the whale. He had been a great land monster like an enormously large hippopotamus or seal, but what he then fed upon I do not know. Whatever it was, he needed teeth to eat it with, and he had them, a great many in both of his great jaws. But when, for some reason or another which it is now impossible to find out, he began to stay longer and longer in the sea until he did not care to come on shore any more, of course he had to find quite other things to eat, and, of course, he had to eat these other things in quite a different way. And besides, having taken to the sea, the whales split up into different families, each of which had

ways of their own, and lived upon special kinds of sea-food which they liked best, or, what comes to the same thing with animals, which they could get easiest.

"And now we come to the particular kind of whale to which I belong, and which I think, of course, is the most interesting of them all, the great Greenland whale. His family were rather timid and fearful, although they were so big, and so, being anxious to get out of the way of the other whales, they swam in their slow way far up north, where the ice mountains grow, where for six months it is always night and for six months it is always day. And it is so cold. It is a place of which you might say that it never gets warmer although it often gets colder, because it is really never warm at all, even in the middle of what should be the summer. This did not trouble the whales much, because they all wore big thick overcoats of fat that kept the cold out very well ; but they soon found that the food they wanted very badly was getting scarcer and scarcer. At that time they used to eat anything fishy that came along, if only it swam slowly enough for them to overtake it, or if it was silly enough to swim into their mouths. But gradually the things upon which they lived got fewer and fewer and softer and softer, so that they had no use for their teeth at all. This, you may be

sure, troubled them very much, and they had to grow something instead of teeth that should help them to catch this small shy food of theirs, which their teeth could not touch. Let me say in passing, that you are not to suppose that all these changes took place in one whale's lifetime, but came about gradually through the lives of a very great number, each succeeding family doing a little to alter itself so as to be able to keep alive. It all happened in a very natural way, and you may know how in yourself. Let us suppose, only suppose of course, that you are a very unkind little girl, fond of saying and doing cruel things, and giving pain to your friends. You know that it is wrong and that you should not do such things, but you will not try to stop, you rather try to do more of these cruel things. So you get worse and worse until at last you cannot be good and kind if you would, and your whole life is a danger to yourself and everybody else. But if when you feel inclined to do something kind or say something nice, you do all you can to help on that feeling, it will come easier every time to do so ; and in just the same way, if when the bad fit comes on you try all you can to fight against it, it will become harder and harder to do it, until at last you will not want to do it at all.

"So the great Greenland whale, not using his teeth because he did not want to for one thing

and for another, because he really had not much opportunity, gradually found them becoming of no use to him : and side by side with that loss he found that he was getting something else which, for the purpose of catching such food as was plentiful where he had come to live, was of the utmost use to him. And this something was what people call whalebone. When the whale-baby is first born he has a row of pretty white teeth growing closely together all round his top gums, but very soon these first teeth drop out, and plates of horny stuff with fringed edges on the inside begin to grow downwards from the roof of his mouth. Indeed, it seems as if the rough ridges on the roof of the mouth that you can feel you have were growing longer, and separating down the middle into two rows, one each side, until they made a sort of a fence of horny plates growing closely side by side and coming each of them down to a point. They grow very fast, for the young whale is only fed by his mother for about three months, and if he is to live at all on what God has now provided for him to eat in those bitterly cold waters, he must have the right sort of tools to catch that food with. So, of course, those funny plates of bendy stuff came farther and farther down as the little whale's mouth got bigger and bigger, until presently he found out that as he swam along through water swarming

with tiny little shell-fish he could gather a great many of them into his mouth, and by pushing his tongue up between those two rows of fringed plates he could squeeze the water out and keep the fish behind. You see they made a kind of a sieve. Well, it was a fine discovery, because he had a curious little trap door in his throat that wouldn't let the water down, but that he could open at the right time, and let the fish down that he had sifted out of the sea. And all the time, with the top of his head just out of the water, he could breathe, for the opening of his breath pipe was there ; and as you can go on breathing and eating at the same time, so could he, only easier. Easier because your breathing pipe and swallowing pipe come into one opening at the back of your throat, while his breathing pipe ran along the back of his head down into his lungs and never came near his throat at all.

" Now I was just a little tiny part of one of those plates, one of the very biggest of them, growing right in the middle of his mouth. And as he grew and grew so we grew with him, until by and by we were so long that we could not have been stood upright in this room. The young whale became fully grown—I cannot tell you how old he was, because we do not notice time—but he grew until he was as big as fifteen or sixteen great elephants all rolled together in one lump.

I know this is hard for you to believe, but it is true. And it did not seem as if ever he was going to stop getting bigger, for he was always catching great mouthfuls of these little shell-fish—the water where he lived being quite thick with them. But he did stop growing, as men do when they get to a certain age, and then he began to get fat : so fat that in some places his blubber, which is something like the fat on very fat bacon, was two feet thick ! That was around his shoulders. This he wanted to keep him warm, for you must remember that where he lived the water was as cold in the height of summer as it is with us in the depth of winter, while in the winter all the sea was frozen up several feet in thickness, and he had to stop breathing and eating, and go to sleep beneath the ice until the spring came again, when, of course, his great coat of fat had got quite thin from his long fasting. At least that is what I think ; I do not know how else he could have lived in that frozen ocean all through the winter, when the ice got too thick for him to break it up with his head, and I know he did not go south to get into warmer water. Of course, being such a very small part of this great creature, I do not know all his ways.

“ He was very gentle and kind, only eating those tiny creatures of which I have told you, never fighting as other kinds of whales do, and

giving shelter in his great mouth to a lot of lazy fish that would not look for their own food, but just hung on to the quiet places about his palate and tongue, and took a portion of all the food he ate. But he did not trouble. He was quiet and contented, only wanted to live and eat and interfere with nobody. You see he had no idea of getting on in the world except to grow as big as he could by eating as much as he could get, and he was not able to think about to-morrow, which you have to do as you grow up.

"At last one day, when he had grown very fat, so fat that he could only swim very slowly and just lazily open his mouth under the water to let his food roll in, there came a dreadful change. Some men in a ship came into those seas when the ice had nearly all melted away, and they had all sorts of spears and guns with them for the purpose of killing the poor whales. You see they were very poor men, with wives and little children to keep, and the country where they lived was so poor that they could not earn enough there to keep them. So they went out upon the sea, knowing that if they could manage to kill some whales and take the fat off their bodies and the whalebone out of their mouths, this oil and whalebone could be sold for a lot of money. Then it (the money) would be divided among the men, and they would have food and

clothes for their darlings. They came then in their ship up among the floating mountains of ice looking for whales, and one lovely morning, when the sun was shining down upon those shining white ice-fields and ice-bergs, and the blue sea in between was looking just like a great mirror, they saw my whale. They let their boats down into the water very quietly, and rowed along gently until they came up to the side of my master, who did not hear them at all. And the first thing he knew about them was the feeling that they had stuck several long spears into his body, which, of course, hurt him very much. He did not know what to do, but felt that if he went down into the deep sea, these men who had hurt him so would not be able to follow him, and so he might escape. He had no thought of fighting them—he never had thought of fighting anybody. But when he went down, down into the deep sea, he felt something dragging at his body—it was the long rope tied to the barbed spears, the harpoons, which they had stuck into his poor tender skin and which would not draw out again. And so after a very little while he felt as if he must come up again, because the pain was so great, and he thought he could get a little ease if he yielded to the upward pull. Slowly as ever he could he rose to the sea surface, but when he did arrive there the cruel men were

waiting for him with long, slender, and very sharp lances. These they thrust into his body, trying to find out where they could hurt him the most. Presently they touched his heart, his big heavily beating heart, and as soon as they did the sharp burning pain told him that he could not hope to live any longer—he must just die and become a prey to those hungry men. So after a little while, since his blood was pouring out upon the blue sea in a hundred streams, he died—as quietly as he had lived—and the men who had killed him pulled him alongside of their ship.

“As soon as they had done so they began, with sharp spades and big knives, to cut off his great covering of fat, which they pulled on board, cut in small pieces, and put away in iron tanks, to be boiled down presently when they got back. But the chief thing they wanted was the great upper jaw, containing what they called the whalebone, that being worth far more than all the rest of his poor body, which now laid so limp upon the waves. So they worked furiously to cut off his very big head, and presently, with a terrible amount of hard work, they had the upper jaw cut away from the rest of the body, and with its great fringe of whalebone it was lifted on board. The long blades of precious bone were shorn away from the white tough gum in which they were stuck, the heaps of valueless matter

was flung overboard, and then, very carefully, the whalebone was scraped clean and put away. But every fine day after that until the ship got home—that is, when no other work was pressing—the great heap of whalebone blades must needs be brought out and dried in the sun, wiped, scraped, and trimmed, so that they should be fit for the buyers of the stuff, who were very quick to notice any spot of mildew or decay.

"At last the ship reached port and all the cargo was taken to the warehouses, the whalebone being especially cared for as being the spoil upon which the owners depended for their profit on the voyage. Now I felt that this was a curious change indeed. I had seen many wonderful changes since first I grew in the whale's mouth, but now in this dark, evil smelling place, with the most perfect quiet all around, I felt that I had come to the end of all things. How long my companions and I lay there I do not know, not being able to take any account of time; but at last the great doors were opened, the bright day streamed in, and men came in great haste with much noise and dragged us all away. It was very bewildering after our long, long quiet, but the change was not unpleasant; especially when we were carried into a large building where there were many noisy machines, and a roaring of machinery louder than I had ever heard during a storm at

sea. I felt myself torn from my hold upon my fellow fibres, sharp knives smoothed down my edges and left me presently what you see me now. Eleven other pieces like myself were laid side by side in a neat bundle and fastened together for sale.

"I cannot tell you where we went for we were wrapped in paper, but when again the light broke upon us I saw a long room filled with busy work-girls, who were surrounded by heaps of beautiful stuff for making dresses. One of them took hold of me, and with a quick clever movement of her fingers ran me down into a pretty little silken case in the side of the bodice of your mother's lovely frock, the one she wore when she went to see the Queen. I felt so cosy and comfortable, although I was sorry to be shut in the dark again. Also I could not help wondering at the great change in my experience, from the roaring ice-fields of the frozen northern seas, and the wonderful deep dark places of the sea, to nestling against your mother's gentle side, helping to make her pretty dress fit her more perfectly.

"I do not know how many times your mother took me out with her, but I know that there came a time when I was again quite quiet, hung up in my snug little house in some corner where no sound ever came. Until a little while ago I felt myself taken out with my companions and

brought into the light once more. Something bright and sharp ran down the little cosy pouch in which I had lain so warmly, and let me out into the light again. And this morning, as nurse was carrying a handful of us into her room, she stopped here to do something for you, she dropped me, and so here I am."

"What will you do now, you clever little thing?" said Dolly wonderingly.

"If you like I'll stay with you. But it will not be for very long. I feel sure that I have many more adventures before me yet, because you see I do not get worn out or broken, and I may see many strange things yet before I am burnt."

Just then nurse came in to see how her little charge had been getting on all alone, and was delighted to hear how well Dolly had been entertained by the story of the little piece of whalebone.

XXV

The Mystery of Selfishness

A PARABLE FROM NATURE

IT was a lovely place in which to be born. If one could have chosen his birthplace, bearing in mind all that he would like to find around him for beauty and comfort and health, there could not have been a more perfect answer to his wishes than this, always remembering the necessity of a particular environment for a particular species of creature. It was in the sea, the warm quiet tropical waters of the North Atlantic in twenty-six degrees north latitude and thirty degrees west longitude, just on the western edge of the great ocean river, the bend of the Gulf stream where it runs south to join the Equatorial Current. There, where the sea is warm as new milk, and waves never run high because the faithful Trade winds are gentle as they are steady, are far-reaching fields of fairy-like sea-vegetation, all of one colour it is true (a pale golden tint), but in frond and fruit most beautiful. In the quiet groves and thickets

of this wonderful sea-field there are a myriad forms of curious life, for it is the first home of an amazing multitude of the sea-folk, and it affords a protection to them in their first youth which is of pre-eminent importance, since the larger fish cannot ravin there unhindered by reason of the density of the sea-foliage.

In one tiny corner of that immense area of fucus there hung, delicately attached to a branch by some wonderful mucilage unaffected by water, a little purse apparently of dove-coloured kid. It was gently swayed to and fro by the almost imperceptible motion of the sea, as it had been for many days. One morning, as if in obedience to a silent command, it came open from top to bottom, but so easily, so free from all apparent presence of compelling impulse that it might almost be said to melt apart. And from it there emerged a little company of fourteen baby fish, huddling together as if this great new world into which they had just entered was so terrifying to them that they must needs cling to one another for protection, for company, since other protection there was none. They were quaint little creatures. Each of them was about half an inch long with a curious flat head, upon which a very keen-eyed observer might have detected some strangely regular diagonal lines, perfectly smooth, scaleless bodies, with little slits at the side of the

head where most fishes show the opening of the gills, mouths that seemed to split their heads in half lengthways, and eyes like tiny black beads. Each of them carried attached to him by a strong cord a little bag of provisions accurately calculated to last three days, food that was perfect in its properties, and required no effort either to eat it or digest it—it was just taken in unconsciously as breathing. By the time it was all expended the fish would have learned how to obtain its food in the manner it ought to follow during life. I say "*ought* to follow" for a definite reason, which will presently appear.

The life of the new animals was for the first three days by no means full of joy. Hampered by the burden of the food-sac, and full of inherited apprehensions of danger lurking on every hand, the small band clung timorously together in the deepest recesses of a huge bunch of weed, hardly daring to move, yet conscious of increasing power. Their new world was so vast, so mysterious in its countless shadows, and the stealthy comings and goings of its innumerable inhabitants, that but for the inherent desire of continuing to live so firmly planted in the breasts of all young creatures, they would doubtless have given up the struggle. Side by side with that fierce need of life they felt its complement : an intense craving to feed upon others weaker than themselves ; and

as the full hours glided past and they knew that the supply of food they had been born with would soon be gone, this craving grew until it must needs be satisfied. Strangely enough, none of them seemed to notice the grim fact that their numbers were dwindling. In some stealthy fashion one after another of them disappeared ; they were not. Like the air-bubbles ascending, silvery globules of light exhaled from the gills of hidden swimmers and suddenly becoming invisible, so these new animals ceased to be, their destiny fulfilled.

Presently of the original fourteen there remained but one, a sturdy little fish, whose instincts were all well developed and who, even before the last vestige of his first food supply had disappeared, had stealthily swallowed some smaller wayfarers that had incautiously sauntered near, finding them both in flavour and filling properties eminently satisfactory. He felt less lonely too than at first, which may seem strange since all his brothers and sisters had vanished. But really, after the first trembling emergence from their cosy envelope, the society of each other had speedily ceased to interest any of them. One object in life, one overmastering desire had full possession of the single survivor—to satisfy the cravings of hunger. Subordinate to this, and only dimly present to his consciousness, was the neces-

sity of avoiding the fate he so ardently wished to inflict upon others. These two incentives to energy compelled an innate tendency he felt to be slothful to lie dormant for awhile, and indeed no observer of his manners, however keen, could have said truthfully that the little fish had the slightest inclination to be lazy. Indeed his energy was to a human eye phenomenal. Even when lying hidden under a leaf watching the approach of a possible victim, he had perforce to lie motionless, his whole system vibrated with potential energy, every nerve was tense until suddenly, like the passing of a thought, he had gone and returned, his prey yet quivering within him.

So amid escapes unaccountable, touching the teeth of death almost as often as he himself seized the smaller fry upon which his frame daily grew in strength and agility, he passed many joyous days. Joyous that is as far as his limited appreciation went. For him there were no ethical considerations of right and wrong, no sense of compunction for the suffering of others, no reproofs or punishments. All his sensations were self-centred, all his desires narrowed down to just the enjoyment of life and the avoidance of death. Moreover, he had no prevision. For him there was no future as also there was no past. And so in his degree he was almost perfectly happy. Almost, why not quite ? Well—and

herein arises a curious factor in the lives of his kind, distinguishing them from all the other sea people—as he grew older the need for such a continual exhibition of energy became distasteful, irksome to him. Now this anomaly in healthy vigorous life, though common enough, alas ! among the highest of all animals, is strange and abnormal in the extreme among the lower animals and especially fish. They seem to find their chief delight in the exercise of their amazing powers of locomotion, the sheer joy of living appears to urge them on to the most extraordinary manifestations of energy. And even among those whose organic development precludes the possibility of swift movement, there will almost always be found some other manifestation of energy suitable to their physical powers ; they cannot be called lazy.

But the subject of our story was one of a class that is an exception to the almost universal rule. Throughout many generations his ancestors, encouraging this slothful distaste for exertion instead of combating it, had actually developed it into a science with fitting appliances for the purpose of carrying it to its perfect conclusion. The ability not merely to live upon others, but to do so without the expenditure of any physical force in so doing, was their object, and in its pursuit they used all the higher powers of their

nature until they attained an ability of indolence that in a lower animal than man was marvellous. The principal mechanical results of this striving after an easy life is seen in every member of the family, rudimentary in the fry, but becoming perfected within the first three months. It is an oval plate on the top of the flat head, having a series of angular grooves springing diagonal from each longer side of its border, and meeting in the middle like a succession of Vs. The whole appliance becomes in the living creature a pneumatic attachment of the most perfect, as well as of the simplest kind. Touching any surface large enough to cover it, the contact becomes an adherence of the firmest character, so that the creature may be carried along through the water at the highest speed possible, yet be not in the slightest degree inconvenienced, much less detached. This I have tested personally, by using all my strength to try and drag one of these fish from its hold by its tail, exciting a far greater strain upon the suction apparatus than any passage through the water by its host could do. Of course a slight forward push is sufficient to displace the fish, but in ordinary life that would never be given.

In consequence therefore of this inherited disposition towards indolence and a growing desire to make others provide for his needs, our young

fish gradually became less and less energetic in the pursuit of prey, and tested his holding-on appliance more and more frequently as he found substances that gave him a fair surface whereon to stick. But this he found very unsatisfying, because the creatures upon which he must needs feed had an awkward habit of noticing the greyish streak of his body lying along a piece of drift-wood or a great weed-stem, and avoiding it most carefully, thus making it necessary for him to detach himself far too frequently for his liking in order to go in chase of the food that refused to come to him. But still he persevered for a considerable time, growing less and less inclined to exert himself except under the stress of absolute need, until one day he attached himself unintentionally to a moving body. He did not realize at the time that his involuntary host was one of the same huge family of which he was a distant and decidedly degenerate relation, nor had he known would the fact have seemed to him of any importance. Now, however, he found himself carried far away from the pleasant nooks of his birthplace out into the wide vastnesses of unencumbered ocean ; found too, a great pleasure in the swift motion without any exertion on his part, since the act of holding on was performed automatically and involved no expenditure of energy at all.

In this pleasantly easy manner he was borne swiftly through thousands of miles of sea, becoming each day more and more contented with his lot in life, and still less desirous of ever doing anything for himself at all, as he could count with such apparent certainty upon all he needed being done for him or brought to him. Only occasionally, and this he thought a great hardship, he got scraped off against some piece of wreckage or outlying edge of rock. This made it necessary for him to put out all the energy of which he was capable in order to regain his position, and was indeed a great and, as he felt, an unmerited hardship. That his sudden dislodgment was due to the almost frantic efforts of his host to assuage the intolerable irritation caused by his long adhesion he neither knew nor cared, its consequences to him were his sole concern. Even then there were considerable compensations. Being attached to an omnivorous creature of great energy and an enormous appetite he was continually being taken into the midst of abundant food. And as he was in nowise dainty or discriminating, this bountiful provision even of offal suited him exceedingly well. So he grew and thrived, and became less and less capable of providing for himself every day. Under his present comfortable circumstances he still found it necessary to use some slight efforts, not to obtain food,

but to reach it as it passed by him, making it often necessary for him to detach himself momentarily from his host, which same exercise daily grew more and more distasteful, harder and harder to perform. Then suddenly there came into his life a catastrophe, the magnitude of which to him it is hard for us to estimate —his host was captured and hoisted on board of a ship. He only just managed to detach himself in time to avoid capture also. And as it had now become impossible for him to lead an independent life for any length of time he was obliged to make the vessel his host, which previous experience reminded him was not likely to result in such abundant provision for his wants as the hospitality of a living creature would be. It is true that at first he obtained an enormous amount of tasty food, due to the cutting up of the body of his late host, but to get that he had to use considerable exertion. And after that first great feast was over he found supplies sadly wanting. Many an excursion he made after some fancied luxury, only to find it, literally, dust and ashes in his mouth. Yet he had no initiative, his instinct did not supply him with the needed directions how to find another and more suitable if unwilling patron, and more than that, the food he ate so greedily bred in him a desire to utilize the strength it gave him for helping himself. And an accident

helped him that grieved him sorely, making him feel that something was entirely wrong with the scheme of Creation as far as he was concerned. He was more than ordinarily hungry, and the vessel being becalmed was making a languid circuit of her, looking eagerly in every direction for sight of something eatable. Suddenly he saw something gleaming in the still water near. It was white and had a slender thread attached to it, which meant nothing to him. He swam up to it, took it in his mouth, and thought he had never tasted anything so nice as salt pork in all his life, when to his horror and disgust he felt a sharp pain shoot through his head—felt too that he was being drawn upwards in a totally different way to his usual experiences as a passenger. A sudden impulse made him swerve in towards the vessel and with a great effort fasten himself to her bottom. There was a wrench, a dreadful pang, and the strain ceased. He felt safe although the pain was still intense. The hook with which he had been caught had torn out, and as an added injury the piece of pork had also gone. Moreover, this, his first experience of the machinations of mankind, bred in him such a profound distrust of anything that might conceal a deadly lure that he hardly dared look at food as long as the ache in his jaw gave him painful recollections of how he had been deceived. But for the dread of hav-

ing to provide for himself, of putting forth that energy he had so long devoted himself to conserving, he would have left the ship at once.

As, however, in the lives of all creatures there come predisposing causes outside of their wishes and efforts, it came about that very shortly after his painful experience, and while yet the state of his mouth made him timid, a huge black shadow ranged up beneath the ship, and, materializing near him, gave him such a fright that he released himself from his hold on the copper and passed gently into warmth and darkness, for he had entered all unconsciously the mouth of a basking shark, the largest of all the great shark family, and—but that he did not, could not know—also the most harmless to all living creatures beyond the scale of the smallest and softest: a great sluggish fish, whose mouth was only furnished with the tiniest, most ineffective of teeth, and even they were covered with a veil of thinnest skin, almost a membrane, as if to prevent them doing any harm whatever to other creatures, and to compel their owner to live upon the lowest organisms in the sea which might be eaten without biting or any attempt at mastication, which latter process indeed is one that all fish eschew.

The natural instinct of the frightened intruder impelled him to fasten on to the first available surface, which happened to be the roof of the great

shark's mouth. I will not say what the latter thought about this sudden intrusion, and the unpleasant sensation of having something suddenly stuck on to the roof of his mouth, because I do not know. But it is quite immaterial, as he could not do anything to eject his undesired guest, since fish, as is generally known, have almost immovable tongues and cannot wipe anything off the upper parts of their mouth. The lodger, on the other hand, after the first terror had passed away, finding that nothing was happening, and getting accustomed to the warm dark, ventured in timid fashion to rearrange himself, feeling doubtless, in obedience to his inherited predilections, that in any circumstances it was always well to make himself as comfortable as possible as the conditions of his environment would permit. His languid efforts in this laudable direction were entirely satisfactory to himself; for having secured himself with his head pointing towards his host's mouth and his tail streaming backward towards the great throat, he found that a little light came in, the inflow of fresh, that is clean, sea-water impinged upon him in exactly the right place, and in short that he was fairly, and likely to be very, comfortable.

Moreover, and this was his prime discovery, he presently found that the small molluscs that came almost constantly streaming in to the great

opening before him had a most satisfactory way of whirling about within the cavity of the huge mouth, and an almost sufficient number of them found a half-way house, as it were, a point of interception, which was *his* mouth. And as all food was acceptable to him, it may readily be understood how extremely so were these savoury little morsels which all fish love so much. This arrangement impressed him as being nearly perfect, since now he would no longer need to make even the slight effort of detaching himself for a minute or so from his base, but found all his wants supplied without any necessity for prevision or exertion on his part. But, it may well be asked, what about his host, who had not been consulted, who might reasonably be supposed to endure much annoyance and discomfort, if not positive pain, from the presence in so sensitive a spot of such a large parasite, who, while not doing active harm to the tissues to which he had fastened himself, was certainly not doing any good ? The clinging of outside parasites to the skin of the larger fish is obviously a terrible nuisance to them, causing them to excoriate their skin against the needle-like points of the coral, in the hope of dislodging their unpleasant hangers-on. This, it is supposed, and with great reason, is why the whales exhibit such tremendous power in their upward leapings out of the sea at times, when they are entirely un-

molested by man or chased by other enemies. We may fairly assume that the irritation becomes almost intolerable, maddening ; so that what it must be inside the mouth is most difficult to realize.

Our slothful subject, however, was concerned for none of these things. The goal of his desire was reached at last, and, supremely content, he lay and ate and waxed fat, nor ever dreamed that he was becoming ever more unfit to make a supreme effort which might at any moment become necessary in order to save his worthless life. And as the unheeded time slipped away, and he grew bulkier, more lethargic, more indifferent to all things save the steady supply of food, he grew more amiable. He did not even resent the intrusion of two others of his species, who also found their way in to his home and anchored themselves near him, bent upon enjoying a like immunity from looking after their own food and safety. Although the three, each wrapped in himself, took no heed of one another, they yet preserved the peace ; there was no enmity if there was no friendliness.

Then suddenly there came a catastrophe. The huge shark in whose mouth the easeful ones dwelt so serenely was seized with a strange lassitude, a failure to meet the necessities of his existence. Languidly he swam, obeying some un-

known impulse, toward the shore. Keeping near the surface he was buffeted by the waves, until at last, getting among the breakers surrounding a reef-fringed islet, he was flung heavily against the jagged rock points and died. The unheeding seas beat against the great limp body until they had driven it on shore, where it lay limply, only just stirred occasionally by the ripple of the waves, until, the tide falling, it was left to fester in the blazing sun. And the busy crabs came and feasted enormously, taking all that came in their way, and especially appreciating the choice morsels provided by the bodies of the lodgers, who had shared the fate of their host as fully as they had enjoyed his involuntary hospitality.

XXVI

The Fate of the Inventor

A LITTLE group of stalwart Maories lay upon the beach in one of the outlying coves of the Bay of Islands, resting after their terrible toil of towing a sperm whale ashore. Two days had elapsed since the lookout man of their little bay whaling station had reported the visit of a couple of those valuable cetaceans within the area of the firm's operations, and the fine descendants of ancient warriors lying idly in their well-equipped whaleboat floating off the base of the cliff upon whose summit the lookout man was perched, had eagerly responded to his signal, and made the buoyant craft fly seaward in chase. It had been a bad season for them, not that whales had been scarce, but luck had been against them, weather had been bad, and in spite of their entirely heroic efforts to capture a whale, it was now nearly three months since their last haul. And since they were quite dependent upon the proceeds of their whaling for all the necessities of life except fish, they were feeling the pinch of poverty. Yet

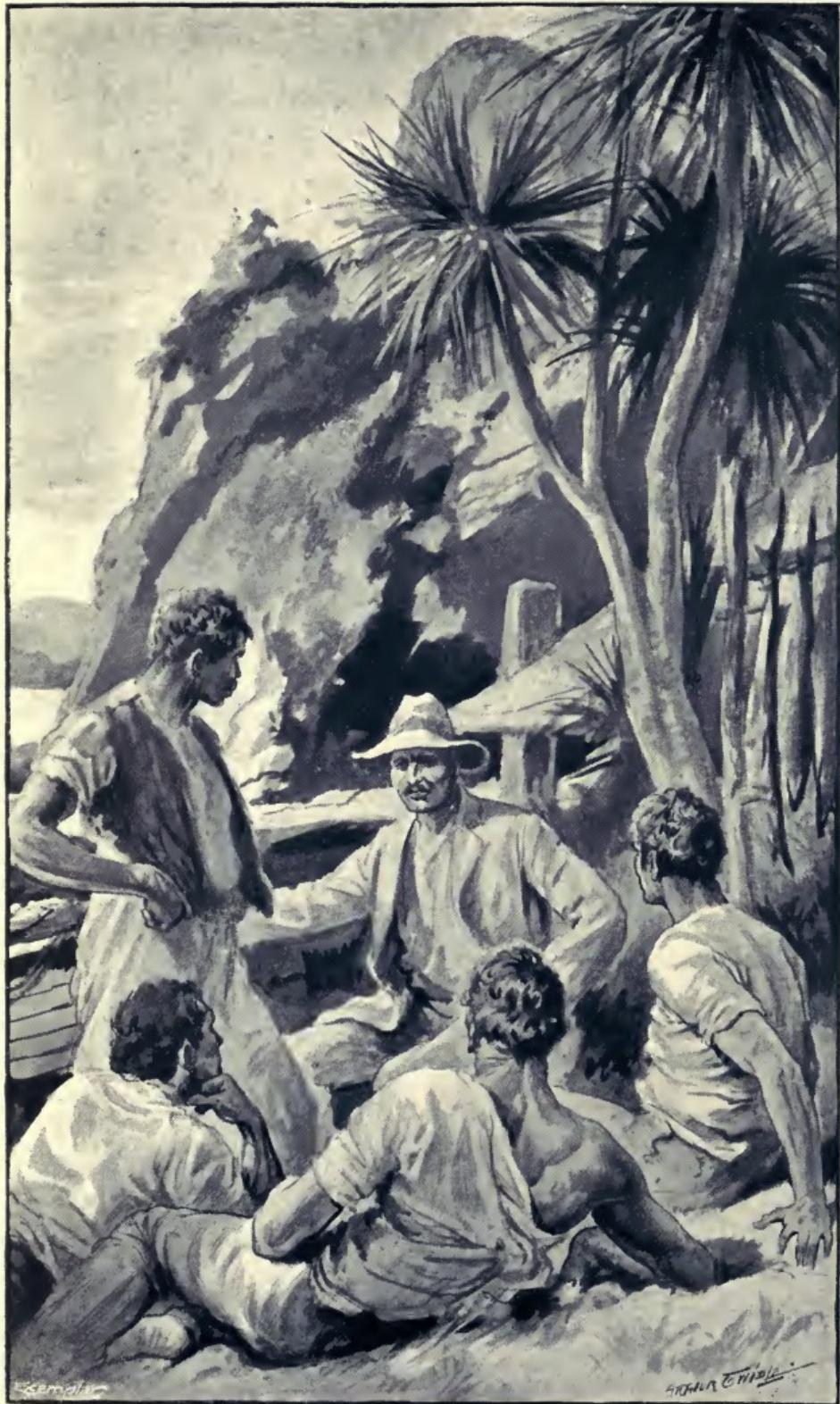
none of them complained, or thought of forsaking the toilful business in which they had spent most of their lives. Often they thought regretfully of the days when their beautiful harbour was the rendezvous of scores of whale ships, and money might be easily made, or positions of trust and honour accepted, as harpooners and boat-headers, in ships whose masters knew the value of these splendid hunters of the monarch of the seas. Now months would elapse before a solitary whale ship would come lounging in, and such straggling survivals of the hearty money-making days of sperm whaling brought no cash to their pockets.

So they had been fain to establish a little joint-stock concern of their own, and wrench from the sea by the severest toil in the old-fashioned way a precarious existence for themselves and their large families. But they had the patient endurance of savages persisting, although they were quite civilized, and well educated even, according to the European standard for working-men. But this last capture had been so hardly purchased that it appeared almost sufficient to deter them from continuing so exacting an occupation. When the whale was sighted it was blowing half a gale right on shore, and they had pulled dead in the teeth of that stern blast for over six miles before they had succeeded in reaching the uncon-

scious mammal and hurling two harpoons into his black wrinkled side. Then he had fought most doughtily with jaws and flukes, adopting every method of attack and defence, acquired by him in several conflicts forced upon him during his long life by whalers who longed for the profit he carried about on his vast body. And had he not felt the weight of his years, with possibly some added disability on account of old wounds, it is very doubtful whether all the patience, skill, and courage of his aggressors would have been sufficient to master him. In fact, they themselves had almost begun to despair of victory when suddenly, while still the sinewy boat-header, Ropata, had some vigour left, the whale had rolled upon the surface away from the boat and exposed the broad rotundity of his belly: only for a couple of seconds, but long enough for Ropata to hurl the slender five foot lance with so true an aim that it sank up to the hitches of the shaft through the soft blubber and into the centre of that mighty heart. Then it only remained to keep out of the way for a few minutes while the blind, deaf, and dying monster churned the sea into bloody foam in his last monstrous protest against the coming of death. With their skill in boat handling and the perfect discipline among them making them act as if one mind informed them all, the doughty five

found their task of keeping clear an easy one (for them), and presently out of the tremendous turmoil peace emerged, a silence that seemed oppressive, as the vast carcase lay on its side, rocked gently by the swell and keeping off the near approach of the waves by the exuding oil from its many wounds. A short smoke was all they could allow themselves, although their flaccid muscles bore eloquent testimony to the strain of the past few hours, for they noted, with the most extreme dissatisfaction, that the direction of the wind had altered. It was now blowing nearly dead off shore, but fortunately the force of the wind was taking off. All the available provision consisted of a couple of ship biscuits per man and about a gallon of water, so that they could not look for much replenishment of exhausted tissue, and therefore it was with a sense of asking for all, and perhaps a little more, than willing flesh and blood were able to give that Ropata cried to his harpooner, "Heke, haul up, boy, there is no time to spare. Huru, Kawiti, Tuki, Rautara, let us be doing. The sooner we get his majesty under way the better."

All obeyed simultaneously and silently, for all knew the need, and had an equal interest in success. They hauled the boat alongside the mighty spread of the whale's tail, and with much labour hewed off the wide spreading fans thereof,



Having drawn their great prize up to the wharf, they regaled themselves with a meal and a long rest—p. 291.

so that they might take no hold of the water and hinder progress. Then boring a hole through the thick fibres of the remainder of the tail fin, they made fast their tow line, and with a drift of about forty feet started upon their immense labour. It is not necessary to dwell upon the forty hours of that task, the steady bone-wrenching strain until the whole body felt all pain, the oar a huge mass of timber, to move which was beyond all human power, the whale a vast demon stubbornly resisting all efforts at overcoming his resistance. Their eyes burned like coals of fire, their lips cracked and bled, their hands seemed to be swollen larger than their thighs ; but one thing never occurred to them, that they should give in.

So finally they drew their great prize up to the rough little wharf they used for cutting in the blubber, and, having secured him, were regaling themselves with a long rest after a meal, preliminary to another period of fierce toil in stripping the blubber from the huge and now foul-smelling body. It was while thus refreshing themselves that Ropata, with sententious deliberation, unfolded to them the beginning of a plan that had formed in his mind during the many weary hours of the tow. I am not going to translate his speech into dialect, but give it as nearly as possible in the equivalent English words :—

" Brothers, this last job of ours has set me thinking more than ever before of the tremendous labour we must needs perform before we can secure the spoil we have won so hardly. The chase and capture of a whale is no child's play, it is work the performance of which calls for the utmost strength of men, yet in the joy of doing it we forget the strain upon our bodies, and as for the danger, it is to us the chief charm of the work. And if we could but employ a small steamship to tow in our prize when we have slain him all would be well, for we should be able to rest while the towing was being done for us, and be fresh and ready for the flenching when we had reached the shore. Also, if we could count upon the whales coming nearer in shore, we should not feel the strain so much, for a mile or even two of towing with ordinary fair weather would be comparatively easy for us. But a steamboat is far beyond our means, and, as you know too well, the whales seem far too shy of this corner of ours ever to come within that short distance of our station.

" Now you know the point about twenty miles south, where there is a mighty mass of rocks lying in the sea a short stone throw from the shore, and between it and the point there is a fairly deep channel, sheltered from heavy seas. Well, I have this day remembered that not only have I heard my father speak of the whales choos-

ing on their way south to go through that channel, but twice have I seen a school of from ten to twenty do so."

"But," said Heke, "thou knowest, Ropata, that so fiercely runs the tide southwards round that point that even though that should be the regular way of the whales, we could never get them north of our station when dead. And moreover, before we had killed one we should be down to Waangarura, or may be even as far as the Poor Knights, and what should we do then but lose all our labour, and perchance our boat as well."

"Full well I know the truth of what you say," answered Ropata, "and yet wait till I have unfolded all my plans before you condemn it. Let us, when we have finished our labour of cutting in and trying out, devote two or three of the days of our hard won leisure to the exploring of that pass under Cape Brett, and then will I, if it appear possible, explain to you the rest of my plan. It will be for you all to decide whether it be accepted or rejected. Until then I will say no more."

Silently Ropata resumed his pipe, and presently, in the fierce labour of tearing the blubber from the vast carcase, dissecting the massy head, and converting the evil smelling, greasy lumps into oil, his words were apparently forgotten.

When, however, the work was finished, and the dealers at Russell had advanced money upon the

catch pending its sale sufficient to pay all debts and lay in a stock of provisions, Ropata summoned his partners to him and proposed that they should visit what he had already called the Whale Channel. All agreed with alacrity, and next morning in lovely weather, they embarked with a plentiful stock of food for three days, hoisted their big spritsail to a favouring breeze, and sped away south. As they neared the point Ropata scanned the shore anxiously and continually for a landing-place, where, in the event of their deciding to conduct their operations from the Whale Channel, they might hope to set up their tryworks, and find a sheltered ledge or beach where they might flinch a whale. But none appeared. All the coast was rugged and unapproachable, and its forbidding character grew worse and worse as they went southwards. At last they entered the channel itself, having first furled the sail, for they found that the current set through the narrow pass at the rate of three or four miles an hour. But as they gained the narrowest part, where it was certainly not more than a hundred feet wide, Ropata's keen eyes noted a jagged cleft in the rocks that formed the seaward barrier, and shouting, "Pull two, starn three," bore hard a starboard upon his steering oar, shooting the obedient craft up into a perfect little dock with a gently shelving beach at the far end, which

widened out to nearly double the width at the entrance. As the boat gently grounded all hands gazed around with guttural exclamations of wonder and delight, for it was simply ideal for their purpose. The entrance between two jagged portals of rock barely forty feet apart was perfectly protected from any wind that could possibly blow, and also from any sea that might rise in the narrow channel without. From the entrance to the beach was about one hundred yards, and as the latter was neared the grim walls rose higher, so that the scanty water-space was just like a dock basin bordered with warehouse walls. Finally, from the beach inwards there ran a plateau of about two acres in extent, and then the cliffs rose sheer again.

For a little while none spoke, for they were busy taking in the immense possibilities of the place, supposing that it were true that the southern going sperm whales did choose this narrow way at all frequently. And while they mused Tuki said, "I smell whale ! Yes, and there he is," as a long sleek black form glided past the mouth of the haven, followed almost immediately by another, who ejected his bushy diagonal cloud of vapour as he too surged past the narrow opening. Another and another followed, until fourteen, all fine bulls of about eighty barrels, had passed, while stern brows frowned and strange mutterings

of annoyance passed through bearded lips as the immensely valuable concourse swept by. But Ropata's eyes gleamed with triumph as he foresaw the fruition of his hopes in the immediate future, and as his comrades settled down for a smoke, he said in quiet assured tones—

"Brothers, ye see how perfectly the place is adapted for a whaling station, even on the old lines, if only we could find some way, some means whereby we might evade the stress of the current, and save ourselves from being swept away to the southward with a prize. That, however, I am not going to consider for one moment, for I believe that you will agree with me that the scheme I am going to explain to you is free from any objection whatever on that score. Let us make a great net of two-inch rope, fifteen fathoms long and seven fathoms wide with bordering ropes of five-inch stuff. It must have bridles of five-inch stuff at either end spliced into seven-inch hausers, the ends of which shall be securely moored on opposite sides of the channel, but not hove too taut. Of course the lower edge must be well weighted to keep the net upright in the water, while the upper edge must be buoyed. Not too much though, for I propose using ropes made of our native flax, which is as you know lighter and better adapted for water-work than any other kind, except coir, which is out of the question

both for its cost and its stubbornness. Then when our net is stretched across the channel, the whales, blundering into it as they must, not being able to see ahead of them, will be utterly bewildered, and know not which way to turn. With a stout line from the shore we may push off and lance them at our leisure, only using the harpoon to drag them shoreward when they are dead. The rest of the work in such a fine spot as this will be comparatively easy. What do you say ? ”

Then Heke, who had been listening intently with his eyes fixed upon Ropata’s face, said : “ The scheme sounds well, but I have doubts about any net we may make holding a big bull when once he finds himself hindered ; for who knows what is the utmost strength of a sperm whale when trying to free himself from restraining bonds ? Until now we have only seen him fastened to a boat, which gives to the strain, and when he sounds we must needs give him all the line he cares to take.”

“ I should think as you do, Heke,” answered Ropata, “ if I had not once seen a similar plan tried with complete success by Japanese whalers at Owashi when I was boat-header of the American whaling barque *Porpoise*. They used a net made of bamboo and coir, but they towed it with boats and surrounded the whale with it, one who had ventured well in the bay. He certainly flung

himself about heavily, but seemed unable to do the net any damage, and the cunning yellow men, with wonderful skill and courage, came upon him in canoes, and lanced him so continuously that before long he grew weak from loss of blood and seemed about to go into his flurry. Then all the hunters drew off a little distance and offered up prayers for the repose of the whale's soul, asked his forgiveness for slaying him, and then, finding he did not go into the death agony, they went for him again with redoubled energy, and soon finished him. Whether it was the calming effect of their prayers I do not know, but he died without going into a flurry at all, and with loud shoutings the hunters towed him triumphantly ashore."

"But what about the gear?" murmured Ruatara. "Do you think we shall be able to buy enough rope for the purpose? It will take almost as much as would rig a schooner."

"I have thought of that," eagerly replied Ropata. "Williams, the storekeeper at Russell, will surely supply us, even if we have no money. We have always dealt with him and fairly too, although, as you know, he has often been hard upon us when we have had bad luck such as we have suffered from lately. But I think, if you are agreed, that this venture should be undertaken, providing if the means may be looked upon as assured. Are you thus agreed?"

A loud chorus of assent came unanimously from the four, and Ropata, nodding gravely, said : "That is well. Then we can at once plan out the ground for the tryworks and cutting gear. That done I vote we lose no time in getting back home and acquainting our partners of the lookout with our decision, getting to work and becoming rich." Again a satisfied assent greeted him, and all hands became immediately busy with the details of the new station. This to their practised minds was a matter of very short duration, for they were also sensible men, who only sought the general good, and were not hampered by any fussy busy-bodies with fads of their own which they must bring forward, no matter how the main purpose was hindered thereby. So that night saw every thing settled, and the sturdy band homeward bound, stemming the current under a full press of sail.

They reached home after a boisterous passage on the next morning after their departure from the Whale Channel, and lost no time in getting to work in preparations for removal of their whaling gear. They found the storekeeper, Williams, fairly easy to deal with, as well as willing to take a share in their new undertaking in part payment for the big order for rope which they gave him. To the great task of making the net they bent all their best energies, and so severely did they

toil that within a week the monstrous snare was completed, its meshes being eighteen inches wide, and every one securely seized with hambro' line, and all parts likely to be rubbed against the rocks well protected with spunyarn service. It was a noble piece of work, and looked fit for its intended purpose, than which no higher praise can be accorded to it.

In a fortnight from the day of their return, such had been their expedition that they had all the gear loaded into a small schooner chartered for the purpose, and with high hopes they sailed for the new station, whither they arrived without mishap, and succeeded by dint of much careful labour in warping the vessel into their cove and mooring her to the rocks. Two days saw the schooner discharged, and in another week all was in readiness to begin their novel enterprise. These brief lines must cover the almost incredible amount of labour put forth by the band, labour, too, unmarred by any complainings or attempts of shirking. At last all was in readiness for a start, and looking round with pride upon the perfected preparations which had so changed the appearance of the little cove, Ropata proposed that the occasion should be marked by a feast and songs. There would be no debauch, for intoxicants were entirely absent. Indeed, the whole company were abstainers from anything stronger

than tea or coffee, and had been so all their lives, having early learned how dire had been the effects of fire-water upon their splendid race. So a pig was roasted whole, Maori fashion, and the subsequent feast upon that devoted hog and his accompaniments of vegetables, bread, and duff, would certainly have been deemed gluttonous excess by persons accustomed to a comfortable life ashore and three good regular meals a day. To these hard-bitten toilers, however, it was nothing of the sort, nor did any nightmares disturb their deep sleep afterwards.

Thus far all the preparations for the first realization of the entire scheme had gone forward with scarcely a hitch, but now, when all were full of eagerness to put their materialised ideas into practice, they were all suddenly condemned to idleness for a whole week, eating, drinking, and sleeping, but not earning. For during the night a gale sprang up, and raging through the narrow channel against the rushing current, it heaped up the sea between the rocks in masses of boiling foam. Within the cove the calm of the waters was unbroken, and it was possible to discern, through the seething masses of broken sea outside, the dark forms of whales rushing past apparently in helpless confusion, as if they had lost all control of their motions. Overhead the ragged storm-clouds flew past in masses so low as almost to

touch the rocks, and the patient men sat and smoked through the long, long days, and wondered if ever the mighty storm would cease. Ropata, outwardly unmoved, suffered most, for the burden of debt began to weigh heavily upon him, feeling as he did that he had led his brethren into this enormous outlay, and fretting inwardly at his inability to test the opportunities for recouping it.

At last the gale broke, the sun beamed out, and the sea in the channel smoothed down, while the current was perceptibly lessened owing to the long prevalence of the southerly gale. Not a moment was lost in getting to work. The huge net was carefully unrolled, and one boat with a full crew started for the opposite shore, paying out a whale line attached to the hawser of the net. It was a most difficult task to gain foothold over there, the rock ledges being so steep, but among the preparations the securing of a bight of chain cable around a spur of rock close down to high water mark had been chief, and after much scrambling, straining, bruising, and cuts from sharp stones, the thing was accomplished, and the far end of the net secured. A joyful shout announced the fact to the watchers in the cove, who immediately took their end of the hawser to the windlass erected for the purpose, and hove upon it until the great net spread across the channel,

effectually blocking it to the passage of any whale.

Then they all rested from their labours and awaited the coming of their prey. Three more weary days passed without a sign of whales, but on the morning of the fourth the watchers beheld a sight beyond their utmost expectations. A school of sperm whales led by an immense bull came steering majestically into the channel. The leader touched the net and immediately appeared to lose control of himself. Without attempting to force his way through he wallowed hopelessly, while around him surged in bewildered masses his disorganized followers. The panic spread to the whole school, yet it did not occur to any of them apparently that safety might be found in the opposite direction to which they had been going. And all this colossal confusion arrived in the space of a few minutes. The whole entrance and much off the sea beyond seemed packed with the heaving bodies of the mighty monsters, whose instincts had all failed them in the presence of this entirely new terror.

For a few minutes Ropata and his boat's crew sat as if stupefied. That such an occurrence was possible must have crossed their minds before, but now that it had confronted them its magnitude appalled them. Only for that brief space though. Then, with a yell of triumph, Ropata urged his men to pull forward, and as they emerged upon the

gigantic turmoil each man seized a lance and lunged it at the nearest black mass to him, as if the old destroying instinct of his cannibal ancestors had suddenly awakened within him. Ropata was transformed. Uttering inarticulate cries, his beard flecked with foam and blood from his clenched jaws, his arms seemed to work like the pistons of a steam engine, as untiringly, as forcefully. And yet withal he kept a wary eye upon the closely packed masses before him, and cast an occasional glance at the straining hawsers on either shore to see if they still held. And then suddenly came the catastrophe. He had thrust his lance deep down into the body of a whale, wallowing by the side of the boat, and while wrenching at it in the effort to withdraw it, the whale swiftly rolled outwards, spouting blood. Ropata should have let go, but did not, why, none will ever know: and his body flew through the air, falling between two dying monsters, and disappearing beneath the crimson foam. To attempt a rescue was impossible, for the space between the boat and the point where he sank was close packed with the gigantic bodies of the victims.

His men shipped their lances and withdrew into the cove for a breathing space. Then Heke, taking the leadership, seized a harpoon and hurled it deep into the nearest carcase, shouting to his crew to stern the boat to the beach. They reached

it, and springing ashore, took the line to the windlass and hove the whale in. The other boat followed the example, while Heke and his crew went out again and again until six monstrous bodies were secured and ready for cutting in. And then they saw that the school had gradually recovered from their panic and were returning against the current the way they had come. Several dead whales still lay against the faithful net, which Heke gave orders to have slackened off, so that they might float away, as they could not be secured.

That tremendous day's work assured the success of the new venture, and made comparatively wealthy men of all the partners, but the body of Ropata, the inventor of the great scheme, was never seen again.



XXVII

The Night of Stars

January, 1871

A PERFECT tropical night, without a cloud, not a breath of air stirring, the long, long swell just causing the slightest possible motion of the great hull so deeply settled in the sea. So limpid, so smooth was the expanse of water beneath her that no division between it and the heavens was consciously visible, and it was impossible to avoid the feeling that she was suspended in the eternal ether, having no further concern with earthly things. The great moon swung low on the horizon, but so clear was the air that she was as silvern as if she had been in the meridian, and all the vast serene above, below, and around, was palpitating with cool light. But every luminary that burned so purely above was reflected below in tripled splendour, not calmly shining, but dancing blithely, as if rejoicing in the consciousness of its being but a shadow, and having no solemn duty to fulfil. These lovely

phantoms of far-off suns played daintily with the infinitely lesser pyrosomes around them, engaged in their ordained duties of giving lustre to the dark waters.

And the broad breast of the queen of night shone brighter and fairer as she sank with sweet grace to the waiting bosom of the ocean, dipped with a thrill of rippling incandescence, swam in an aureole of sweetest glow and was gone. A tender deepening of the dark fell caressingly upon heaven and ocean. A deeper hush, a silence superposed upon stillness embraced the restful scene. The stars shone brighter and their faithful reflections below responded in chastened obedience, as if conscious of the high duty that had now fallen upon them of illuminating sea and sky in the absence of the sovereign of the night. But the subaqueous light-bearers shone out more vividly and redoubled their activities. Their numbers too appeared to be enormously increased, until the reflected stars were hardly distinguishable among the multitudes of living fires, and the solemn heavens took on an almost velvety blackness, such as appears within the coronal of the Aurora when it is most brilliant.

This strange reversal of the usual order of nightly illumination lasted for about an hour, during which the solitary ship with her awe-stricken watches seemed like an incongruity—a

huge blot upon the lovely scene, such as would be made by the presence of a black mass of rock in the middle of a flower spangled meadow. But even she must needs partake of the glory around her, for although the light ripples recoiled from her black hull they cast their soft rays upward, and invested her motionless sails with an unearthly radiance, so that she became to all appearance but the spectre of a ship.

Then suddenly, as if the celestial host had grown weary of the display of ocean's mellow fires, there burst out from the intense dark a glorious globe of golden flame like a younger sun, hurling away the darkness with one superb thrust, and eclipsing at the same instant all the marine glow, while the steady stars lost their lustre and hung like points of white chalk. With a sweep like the flight of an archangel, the mighty meteor began the circuit of the sphere, casting off at regular intervals showers of glowing fragments of varied colour to the accompaniment of loud detonations. Behind it shone a band of purest light, twice the breadth of its own disc, which gradually faded according to its distance from its source. When the meteor had made three-quarters of the circuit it paused, and with one tremendous explosion and a dazzling glare it dispersed. Darkness returned as suddenly as it had gone, to the great relief of the watchers, who,

with parched lips and curdling blood, were beholding the apparent disintegration of a world. But their easement was merely temporary. As if that amazing meteor had been the herald of a still more majestic celestial display, there now began a series of graceful movements on the part of the heavenly host itself. Timidly, tentatively at first, the lesser, almost invisible, stars brightened, darted a little way, disappeared. Gradually the larger ones took up the stately measure, making longer and longer flights, until the whole of the midnight dome was occupied by an innumerable multitude of darting meteors entirely hiding the fixed stars, and making it impossible to help believing that, for a time at all events, the orderly orbits of the universe had been forsaken, and suns and planets alike were holding high revels, albeit with befitting gravity. And as every movement of a meteor left a trail of light behind it, the effect upon the vision of the observers was most strange and bewildering. The heavens seemed alive, eternal stability changed into the most excessive mutability, akin to the breaking up of the fountain of the great deep.

Stern and terrible as had been the impression made upon the minds of the observers by this most amazing spectacle, as it continued without alteration fear and trembling gave place to interest, admiration, and wonder what would

happen next, whether these glancing brightnesses really were the once stable stars, and, if they were, would they ever resume the orderly sequence of their eternal journeys through space after such wild vicissitudes as those in which they were indulging. And as the time passed away and still these celestial evolutions went on, the impression deepened that the great apocalyptic change was surely at hand. Long forgotten fragments of St. John's recorded vision returned to the memory side by side with recollections of past misdeeds, and men's hearts indeed failed them for fear. Of course astronomers will smile in conscious knowledge, but still I think that even they will sympathize with the sorrows of these uneducated men and boys suddenly brought into the presence of so stupendous a manifestation of the celestial glories. Towards the close of the middle watch, however, say at 3 a.m., a decrease in the activities of the meteors began to be noticeable, and it was possible to see also, behind the almost incessant coming and going of those elusive brightnesses, the stars shining steadily on. Another half hour and the number of darting meteors was reduced by fully two-thirds, the normal darkness had almost resumed its reign, and men began to be ashamed of what they now felt were childish fears. But they were not yet to be set quite free of alarms. As the meteors ceased their mazy

evolutions there appeared a glow in the *west*, not indeed as of the rising sun, for it was unheralded by any flaming streamers of colour such as spread upward from the eastern horizon at the dawn when the sky is clear, but like the lambent glow before moonrise. Some one whispered "Aurora," but in the most doubtful tones, for we were in 23° north latitude only. Some thought of high dawn, but only for an instant, for it was not yet 4 a.m., and besides the month was January. Still there the light was, spreading upwards and brightening so as to pale the stars again. It could not be the Zodiacal Light, for it was not cone shaped, and besides it had no indefinite glow such as always characterizes that mysterious radiance.

Said one old sailor, "All God's works seem to be thrown out o' gear to-night, an' I expect we shall hear of some dreadful happenings directly we get home—if ever we do get there." Then suddenly there came the familiar summons of the bell—our watch was over, and the little bustle always incident to watch-changing, turning our thoughts to everyday matters, did more to dispel our fears and speculations than any arguments or explanation could have done. A perfunctory account of the wonders of that watch was handed on to the relieving men, received by them, of course, with utter incredulity, and the pressure of recent sleep prevented them from taking more than the most

casual notice of the already fading light in the western sky. What remained of that mysterious glow was dissipated by the arrival of a glorious sunrise, and the "Night of Stars" was only a memory.

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